

## Changes by CDSis

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**Summary:** "She's drawn countless faces over the years, every expression you could imagine, from almost every angle, yet Steve's beaten-to-a-pulp look is way more intriguing; more 'real'. She likes real. Instead of tearing them from her book like she usually does, she leaves them there, so she can go back and look at them wherever and whenever she wants."

## 1. Chapter 1

She likes watching people.

Not in a creepy way, of course! She just finds it entertaining. And sometimes interesting. She watches as they go about their day. Socializing with friends, goofing around in class, changing every day. Every week. Every year. They don't watch her, though. Nobody sees her and she's thankful for that. She's one of very few loners that don't get bothered by people on a daily basis. Some of the teens she can still recognize from her Elementary School days, but others she can't. They change a little too much, and then suddenly it's like there are too many new kids to keep track of. She stopped trying to remember all their names at some point, because it was too much to think about.

But there were a few people around town fascinating enough for her to remember them.

Take *Nancy Wheeler*, for example.

They had basically grown up together, but also didn't. Nancy had the advantage of being born in Hawkins, whereas she moved to Hawkins in the fifth grade. They were the same age, usually placed in the same class every year, and they'd spoken on a few different occasions. Nancy had always been a quiet, shy girl for most of her life, until she changed. The first real change. Without ignoring her best friend, Nancy slowly started focusing on Steve Harrington. The sight had been slightly disappointing. Steve was a bully, not as bad as his friends, but still a bully. But he was also the King. That must have been what snagged Nancy's attention in the first place.

When Steve Harrington happened, Nancy starting acting differently. She was happier, sure, but also... *strange*; like she was trying too hard. Trying to be someone else. Someone better, in her own opinion. She was wrong though. It wasn't *better*, just *different*.

Nancy changed again the week Will Byers and Barbara Holland went missing. She seemed to think she was the only one who noticed or even cared that Barb was gone. The idea that she was alone in her

grief made her hard, cold, impatient. She rarely smiled and didn't stick to Steve as much as before. But Nancy was wrong. She noticed too, and sketched Barbara's face from memory, hoping they would quickly find Barb and Will alive.

And she changed again after Will was found. Barb was still gone, and most people seemed to just forget about her altogether. They were too busy with their own stupid drama and the rumors about where Will had been. Nancy would stare at Barb's locker for a few minutes every time she had to pass by it. And through it all, she kept up the act of a relatively happy teenage girl. She was glued to Steve whenever they had a chance to see each other, Jonathan would join them at lunch most of the time, and she smiled more. The smile never really reached her eyes, though.

The biggest change came a year later. Nobody knew exactly what had happened, but rumor was that she cheated on Steve, though he received absolutely no sympathy. But rumors are stupid and she wouldn't believe anything those assholes said about the nicest girl in their school. Nancy skipped a few days of school a little while after Halloween, mysteriously disappearing at the same time, and for just as many days, as Jonathan Byers. It caused gossip that spread like a wild fire during a drought; too quickly to be believable. People said horrible things about both of them, things that made her so angry for the two of them. She stayed quiet even though she wanted to loudly defend two of her favourite subjects, because nothing she could say would make those assholes stop.

When Nancy came back to school, the papers were saying something about how Barb had died -radiation from a lab near town- and Nancy seemed lighter; like something heavy had been taken off her shoulders and she could finally breathe. And she was now glued to Jonathan. More gossip and rumors and bullshit spread when they walked into school holding hands, but the couple held their heads high and ignored it all. She was proud of them, silently congratulated them, even gave them a nod and a smile that each of them returned.

That day in the cafeteria, she sketched a quick portrait of Nancy sitting next to her boyfriend, smiling in a whole new way. It's kept in a special folder at home to remind herself that even when people call you horrible things and treat you like crap, you can still smile like

*that*; full of affection and happiness.

The next example would be *Jonathan Byers*.

He's a tough person to read and everyone calls him a 'creep' or a 'perv', but she could tell he was good the second she saw him back in fifth grade. He might have been a quiet kid, but she was too, so she felt like she understood him better than others. Yet she never spoke to him. She just watched him. He's always been interesting in a sort of ordinary way.

He still wasn't much of a talker when they got to High School. You could probably chalk some of that up to the many years of bullying, as well as his natural shyness. It was just how he was. It made him *him*. It also helped him watch people the same way she did, but where he used a camera to capture his favourite moments, she drew them with rough lines and dark shading.

They had spoken a few times in their first year of High School. She liked to draw in the red glow of the Photography room, where he developed his 'moments'. The conversations they held were never huge. Not like full-on, deep, philosophical discussions, nor friendly, joking, 'I know you well' back-and-forth's. They wouldn't even exchange full sentences. They would greet each other and ask simple questions like '*how are you?*' or '*how has your day been?*' in as few words as possible, then answer in the same fashion. Short and sweet. One or two word answers were all they needed. That was the extent of their friendship, what they found comfortable.

From what she can see, Jonathan doesn't change much. Not like the rest of the teenagers in their town. He stays quiet and withdrawn, content to hide in plain sight, until his little brother went missing.

He changed a lot when Will vanished. He went from staying out of everyone's way, hiding in plain sight and the shadows, to being in the spot light. He was panicked and rushing around most times she saw him in that week. Really only coming in to hang a poster on the bulletin board.

To be honest, she was happy he wasn't around much that week. What he would have heard being whispered behind his back made her own

skin crawl. She felt sick whenever one of those dicks said something vile about the Byers brothers. It ranged from '*the Creep probably killed his little bro*' to homophobic remarks about the twelve year old boy running off with some creepy older guy, or he was kidnapped. She nearly punched someone in the face for the incest joke he made, but her *Goddamned self control* got in the way of justice. Instead she left in the middle of that class and earned herself some detention after school.

He changed again when Will was found. He was happier, smiling more, but skipped a lot of school to watch over his little brother. When he did come to class it ended up being no big deal that he skipped so often. He was prepared, with homework and grades that not even his horrible attendance could battle, so he never really got in trouble. He also became pretty good friends with Nancy and Steve which was a surprise. The three of them became their own group, Steve dropping his toxic friends to team up the 'Creep' and the 'Slut'; labels neither of them deserved, but still earned somehow.

People still talked about him in some of the worst ways, and treated him like trash, but his brother was back and okay and nothing they said could really effect him anymore.

His next change came a year later, much like Nancy's. She doesn't know why he left for those three or four days, or if he had actually run off with Nancy during that time, but it happened all the same. And when he came back he seemed lighter as well. They came in holding hands, touching shoulders, smiling at each other occasionally as they walked down the hall. He seemed almost like the polar opposite of his previous self which, honestly, made her feel just a little lonely. She had enjoyed not being the only quiet, artistic loner in the school.

He also seemed guilty. Whenever he looked at Steve, or the two boys passed each other in the hall, he would give the former school idol *this look*; a look that was almost like a string of silent '*I'm sorry's*'. She knew why. She's sure Nancy could see it too. Maybe even Steve. The trio became a duo with Steve joining in every once in a while, probably only when his heart could handle it. That wasn't very often.

There's a day, when all three of them are together in a group for an

experiment in Chemistry class. She draws Jonathan's smiling face as he watches Nancy mix the wrong chemicals together, resulting in a fountain of brightly coloured foam. She's frantic. Stands up so fast that she knocks her seat over. Steve is trying not to laugh and Jonathan is giving her that small smile he saves *just for Nancy*. That sketch goes in the special folder, as a reminder that even someone like herself can be happy, whether it's soon or in the future.

Outside of school, another favourite would be *Jim Hopper*.

He's the Chief of Police in Hawkins, and he was obviously not the best choice at first. Not the *worst*, but still not the *best*. Sometimes she would see him going into the station two hours late sometimes, looking hungover and tired as all Hell. He never smiled. Just gave people an annoyed and sarcastic little twitch of his mouth. An expression that probably meant '*go away, leave me alone*'.

But he changed when Will Byers vanished, like a lot of other people did. He comes in early, puts more effort into his job, seems a lot more like a responsible adult than the hungover asshole she'd come to 'know'. He's the one who organizes the search party. He's the one who searches the hardest -next to Will's mom of course- in the usual way, but also in things that probably have nothing to do with the kid. He's the only officer who refused to give up.

She can see him driving up to the Department of Energy with his deputies one day. That place had always given her the creeps. She wouldn't put it past them to have even a tiny part in Will's disappearance. She knew -still knows- what those places are capable of. The sign may say one thing but they do something very different inside the building.

They find Will and Hopper goes back to his old ways, minus the constant hangover. That doesn't last long, though. She was sure he kept away from the booze, but he was a little - or a lot- more uptight. So wound up that he would snap at people for stupid things, then quickly apologize and walk off in a hurry. He seemed to be keeping a secret. On so bad that it made him snippy and put him on edge most days. Maybe it was just a thing for Police Chiefs, maybe it wasn't. Not a lot goes on in Hawkins. Certainly not enough for him to be *that* stressed out.

Then he disappears for about two days, causing the rest of their meager police force to scramble about like a flock of chickens with their heads cut off. It was sad, in a sort of pathetic way, but also pretty funny. When he comes back he still seems stressed, but lighter somehow. Almost like he did something, something to fix the problems nobody else could see, and he felt better for doing it. He was still wound up, but in the usual Hopper way; the better way.

She caught him taking a short nap in his office once. Leaning back in his chair with his hat covering the top half of his face. She'd gone in to file a complaint for her 'Mother' -who couldn't be bothered to get off her ass apparently- and ended up just sitting in the chair meant for visitors, sketching out a quick little thing of the Chief's sleeping form. She leaves twenty minutes later with less of a heavy feeling in her chest. That scene, that little bit of quiet time, made her feel not-so-shitty and gave her some time to do what she loved.

She will always thank Hopper for those twenty minutes, just not out loud.

She keeps that drawing in the folder as well, because the sight of him napping had made her laugh, and when she looks at it she laughs again. Every time. She can still remember his light snores from across his desk.

There are also a few people she watches just because she knows they are terrible. These are the people she commits to memory because she wants to avoid them. Their names and faces and actions are all lined in red, like a warning sign on something dangerous.

*Her 'Mother'* is first on that list.

A woman she met when she was a small child who picked her up and took her in and made her part of a side show. That part of her life is mostly blurry, but she remembers being her new guardian's only meal ticket. Doing tricks for crowds of strangers, getting hit for not doing something right on the first try, getting hit harder for screwing up something she was usually decent at. Minimal amounts of food back then and nowadays. Doing all the chores. Making all the money, most of it going towards 'Mother's' booze and cigarettes. They still live in the trailer, the one she towed around on the back of her rusty pick-up

for years before settling down in the small town of Hawkins, Indiana. It's cramped and musty, covered in trash every time she gets home, clouds of cigarette smoke causing coughing fits -she couldn't even breathe in her won 'home'!- and the lazy bitch sitting on the couch all day. Her eyes glued to the television as some stupid soap opera plays. Going home makes her sick, but being homeless is even less appealing so she stays.

Next is *Billy Hargrove*.

He bullies everyone, including his younger sister, a redhead that hangs out with Nancy and Jonathan's little brothers. She watches him yell at her, sees him take a tight hold of her wrist in his car one day after school, and nearly steps in every time. But there was nothing she could do, really. She was small and weak and the things she *could do* weren't things she *should do*. Then one day, out of the blue, he just stops being a dick. He still drives her around, mostly to and from school, but otherwise they don't really talk or interact at all. And he stops with all the grabbing. He must have been set straight by someone and that person must have been *brave*. Billy obviously had a short fuse and he seemed like a pretty strong guy.

She has an idea of who did it, but then again, it's probably just a coincidence.

There's also one kid from the Middle School. She thinks his name is *Troy*, because that's who the Middle School kids complain about when they discuss bullies. He's the main tormentor of the preteens of Hawkins. He beats on other kids, pushes them around, calls them names, all the stereotypical stuff. And she has absolutely no clue how or why he was given permission to own a switchblade, but he takes it everywhere. Pulls it out for no reason sometimes. When he walks past her in the joined school parking lot with one arm in a cast she smiles a little. Someone must have finally stood up to him. Or he was being stupid and broke it himself, but she has a good feeling that it was someone else's handiwork.

Kudos to that kid, whoever they may be.

Then it was *Tommy H.* and *Carol*. Two kids seemingly joined at the hip. The pair of miserable teenagers used to be Steve Harrington's

best friends. They've always been shitty people, most of the bullying from Steve being their fault. They would pressure him into being just as cruel as they were. And for some stupid reason, he would go along with it. They were horrible, right to the core, and she despised them. They would never change, never get out of the habit that is being-an-ass-for-fun and treating-people-like-garbage.

At least she knows they won't get very far in life with personalities like those.

But back to her other list of people...

Watching *Steve Harrington* was different, in many ways.

She started off hating him. He was a jerk, a bully, and sort of a pig. He was 'King Steve', the ruler of Hawkins High, and nobody dared to stand against him. He wasn't the physical kind of bully. He just said things to people once in a while, but let his pals do most of the tormenting. In her opinion watching and doing nothing when your friends are being dicks is just as bad as being one of those dicks.

The worst thing he'd done in front of her happened when Will was missing. Steve and his buddies gathered around Jonathan Byers in the parking lot. They stole his bag, rifled through it until they found a bunch of pictures and his precious camera. She didn't think he could be so cruel, dropping something like that as if it were a ball that would bounce back up. The lens shattered and some pieces of the camera went flying. Jonathan fell to his knees. Carol and Steve tore up the pictures. It was horrible.

Now, Jonathan hadn't been completely innocent in the fight. It started because he took pictures of Nancy without her knowledge or permission. But he knew and even admitted it was wrong. What he did definitely didn't warrant his prized -and probably very expensive- possession destroyed.

She was disgusted with just how much of a jerk he could be. And at first he stayed a jerk, but then he changed -only a little- when Nancy was distraught over Barb's disappearance. He comforted her when she was around, and tried to find her when she wasn't.

Then something happened and he went full-on-dick mode. He willingly watched as his buddy Tommy spray-painted vile things about the sweet girl, and he painted them in places everyone could see. The fact that Steve didn't step in to stop his friends made her blood boil. She would have done something... but there was no way she could take on four people at once. She watched as Nancy - followed by Jonathan- found the sign, found Steve and his gang, and she lost it. He got a simple slap from her, and after a few choice words that were honestly so uncalled for, Jonathan stepped in to beat the shit out of him. The cops were called. Steve got away. Jonathan was arrested. It was bad.

He moped around after that day until Nancy came back to him. Why that girl forgave him she would never understand, but she did and they both seemed pretty happy. A full year of smiles on both sides, accompanied by their favourite third wheel with a camera. No more toxic friends, no more picking on people, no more shitty attitude. And he was no longer the 'King'. It suited him better, being one of the many 'Peasants' of his former 'Royal Court'; he was a better person in his new position.

Then those days where Nancy and Jonathan skipped school came and suddenly he was back to being miserable, but in a whole new way. Rumors spread about Nancy cheating on Steve with Jonathan, and the two of them running off together to get away from him. They were gross and probably wrong, and they made her sick again. Lies and rumors that came from shitty people always do, especially when they're about people she likes; and she liked the people they were gossiping about right now.

Steve looked depressed. His head hung, he wouldn't look at or talk to anyone, even his hair -his signature perfectly-styled hair- seemed to lose some of it's volume and shine. He was very obviously not in a good place with his only friends gone, and everyone spreading those dumb rumors probably weren't helping. Not to mention Billy riding Steve's ass everyday, harassing him because he was the 'New King'. But if Billy was actually the 'King' of Hawkins, she would gladly kill herself. He was more of a dictator than anything, and it was bullshit.

When the pair came back Steve actively avoided them, and he did so with a face full of wounds. Bruises so dark they were almost black,

one eye purple and swollen shut, a split lip that would bleed when he opened his mouth to talk, little cuts along his cheekbones and one by his eyebrow. She'd gasped quietly the first time she saw how busted-up his face was. Wondered how exactly he ended up like that, hoping it was for a good reason and that he wasn't just being stupid again. She had a good feeling she was right and it wasn't like she was going to ask him. He wobbled as he walked, though, obviously dizzy. His eyes never focused on one thing for too long. It seemed like he was having trouble staying awake. He really shouldn't have been in school with what was probably a concussion.

But he didn't die, so, *yay*?

She found something interesting in his face -through all the bruising and swelling- during the month he was healing. He seemed happier despite being heartbroken -yes, heartbroken, she could tell- and smiled more, even when he wasn't actually happy. He wasn't the kind of happy he'd been with Nancy, or the type of happy he'd been with his 'friends', but he was happy. She thinks so anyways. But he keeps avoiding the Byers/Wheeler couple though, and she doesn't blame him. She would too, if she were him.

He even seemed sort of... *accomplished*. Not even when he was 'King' did he seem at all proud of himself. She liked this new Steve a lot better than the one from last year, and every year before that.

So once a week, every week until his face heals, she draws him. Different angles and different stages of healing, less bruises, less swelling, until he was finally back to his uninjured self; still looking a little proud of himself.

She's drawn countless faces over the years, every expression you could imagine, from almost every angle, yet Steve's beaten-to-a-pulp look is way more intriguing; more 'real'. She likes real. Instead of tearing them from her book like she usually does, she leaves them there, so she can go back and look at them wherever and whenever she wants.

The sketch that goes in the folder is one she does when she sees him hanging out with a group of Middle Schoolers. She notices Nancy and Jonathan's little borthers, along with Billy's little sister, and two boys

she doesn't recognise. They crowd around him excitedly, one by one getting into his car, and he smiles at them. That smile is small and sweet, the way a mother should look at her children, the way Jonathan looks at Will sometimes.

That smile is etched on paper to remind her that even when your life gets turned upside down, and someone breaks your heart, you can always stand back up and be happy with simple things; simple things like a pack of kids piling into the back of your car because you've appointed yourself their babysitter/big brother/temp-mom.

She found it cute.

She *still* does.

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She slips one of her drawings into Steve's locker on her way out after school. It's of his face when he had only healed for about two weeks. The swelling of his eye gone, his bruises still dark but not so close to purple, and the split in his lip noticeable but not in danger of opening when he talked. The one that made him look how he seemed to feel the day she drew it.

She wrote a note on the back, smiling to herself just a little bit as she thought hard about which words to use, then folded it up and pushed it through the vent at the top of his locker.

Hopefully he doesn't find it creepy.

## 2. Chapter 2

Just thought I should start doing this:

I don't own *Stranger Things* or it's characters, just the artist that's being mentioned a lot. Because she's obviously mine. :)

Enjoy, I guess. You don't have to, though.

\*waves\*

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*I wasn't trying to be creepy, but it seemed like an improvement compared to your usual frown.*

*I'll continue to assume your busted face that week was the result of some heroic act instead of a stupid fight that served no purpose, and give you this.*

*Think of it like some kind of medal or reward.*

*P.S. No, I will not tell you my name.*

-L

He stares at the the folded piece of paper in his hand, which fell out of his locker only moments ago, and reads it three more times before unfolding it and being shocked stiff.

It's *him*. His face sketched out almost like a photograph, with his head slightly turned to one side and fading bruises shaded into the right places. Some lines are hard and dark, others soft and light, every angle nearly perfect. He wouldn't say it out loud for fear of being called self-absorbed, but it makes him look *kind of cool*, almost 'heroic'; like the note sort of mentioned.

He's amazed and stunned and kind of happy. Really happy, actually. Happier than he's been in a while. Whoever drew it thought that was what he looked like at some point in time. To them, he wasn't the jerk from last year or the former 'King', he was just some guy who looked good enough to draw. They saw something good in him; good enough to immortalize on paper. And -dare he say it?- *beautifully*, at that.

*Who drew it though?*

He wants to know who they are, not to ask them to draw more or to bother them, but to thank them. He's isn't so down-in-the-dumps now, and he just wants to tell them that, maybe even praise them for their obvious talent.

'L'

It's probably their first initial.

(And also a funny coincidence considering what's happened in the last year-and-a-bit.)

Judging by the note, it was most likely a girl. Their handwriting was neater than any boy's. Neatly curved, even at the ends of straight letters, and the way some letters blended into the next; like they had mixed cursive with regular writing. There was only a handful of girls in his school whose name started with an 'L'. He could ask each one, or keep an eye out in case one of them pulled out a sketch book, maybe patrol the Art Class he was currently failing for her, or just ask around.

Ha, right! Like anyone would want to talk to him, let alone help him out.

The sudden bout of pessimism isn't enough to turn his good mood back around, though. Through the disappointment he keeps on a small smile the rest of the day, content with the knowledge that someone else in this Hell they call High School -besides Nancy and Jonathan, of course- didn't completely hate his guts.

He decides to wait a few days before he starts seriously looking for her.

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**I'm sorry this one's so short.**

**Without the Author's Notes it's only 514 words, but it was all I had. Just an 'in case' thing for anyone who wanted to see Steve's reaction.**

**Or what I think his reaction would be now that he isn't a typical 80's jackass anymore.**

**Anyways, do what ya want with this, tell me if you want more,**

**reviews are requested but not necessary.**

**Tootles!**

**\*waves\***

### 3. Chapter 3

**Disclaimer: I don't own *Stranger Things*.**

**Also... if you recognize the Girl's last name, that's because you've watched *Hemlock Grove*, which is another show I don't own. (it's great, omg.)**

**I have a backstory planned out for this OC and I wanted a pretty last name to go with it, so I borrowed the Werewolf's last name.**

**I'm not very creative when it comes to that kinda thing, sorry.**

**Please don't be mad at me!**

**On with the 'show'! ;)**

---

He has the worst luck, the absolute worst luck, nobody on this planet has worse luck than Steve Harrington!

Okay, no. That's wrong. Compared to plenty of people, including some people he knows personally, he has a decent amount of good luck. Just not today.

First of all, he had trouble with his car that morning and ended up late to school. Then he made an ass of himself when he bailed in the parking lot, the 'trip' probably involving someone's outstretched foot. After that he sadly realized he could only remember a fe of the dozen or so girls who's names started with an 'L'.

*Everything about today sucks!*

But at least he had Babysitting Duty to look forward to later tonight.

The Nancy and Mike's parents had invited Lucas' parents out to dinner tonight and left Holly at a play-date/sleepover, Mrs. Henderson will be at a grief counseling session for Mews -she's still upset about it, even though she has Tews now- and Joyce would be at work all night. Hopper wasn't doing anything, but El had been begging him to let her go to the Wheeler's for a while and he finally gave in. Max will probably show up just because she can.

The adults had tried roping Nancy into the job, but she had a date with Jonathan. She'd come to Steve and practically begged him to

take her place. He was more than happy to watch the little shits for a few hours. He even agreed to do it for free.

It's better than spending the evening alone, right?

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The group of kids and their caretaker ended up crammed in the living room instead of the basement for once. The two couples of the group took the couch, Dustin and Will sitting on the floor in front of it, and Steve in Ted's *Lay-Z-Boy*. They'd put on one of the *Star Wars* movies and settled in with a couple bowls of popcorn. Every once in a while Steve would catch Mike whispering something to El -probably explaining something she'd asked about- and then he'd look to the other side of the couch at a slightly bored-looking Max leaning on Lucas' shoulder as he stares at the TV like he hasn't seen the movie more than ten times.

Steve was pretending to sleep so he could think without interruptions, trying his hardest to make a mental list of girls he knew who had 'L' names; *Lexi, Linda, Lora, Lucy*. There were more, even a few who shared a name, but he was having a hard time with his memory lately. Sometimes he couldn't tell if he already had a horrible memory, or if it was the result of the concussion Billy Hargrove gave him last month. If it really *was* Billy's fault, Steve hoped the douche would catch something disgusting from the next girl he screwed. Or maybe crash his precious car and total it, but live. That would definitely be some great Karma.

He grimaces, rubbing his face with both hands. He didn't need this weird type of stress along with all the other shit he was dealing with. But the curiosity was killing him and he really wanted to thank her.

He wonders if maybe he should ask Dustin, but quickly kills the idea. There's no way someone he had to give dating advice to last month would have any good tips on how to find a girl with no name. Another thought comes, saying it could be another version of 'El', like the telekinetic girl on the couch, but the only girl who could go by that -a tiny girl named Eleanor- was failing Art Class as well.

*It's hopeless, he thinks, I'll never figure this out...*

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She thinks it's funny how frustrated he is.

She never saw his face on Friday when he probably found her gift, but she sees him looking at it the next Monday. He'll stare at it, and after a few minutes his face will scrunch up in frustration. Then he'll fold it up again and shove it back into his pants pocket. She has no clue why it's so entertaining, but it is.

Maybe she's a sadist...

No, definitely not. It's just nice to see him something other than upset or angry. The way his face 'scrunches' as she said before is something different. Almost like a mix of '*I smelled something gross*' and '*deep breath in as I rub my temples*'. If you saw it, you would laugh too. She doesn't though, because then he might notice her, and she really doesn't want him to. That would ruin it all. Especially the amusing sight of him trying so hard to figure out which 'L' she is.

Even if Steve asked around nobody was going to give out her name. Nobody in school knows her by her first name, not even the teachers. They call her by the last name her 'Mother' gave her, *Romancek*, but even then none of them call on her in class. She's practiced blending in, so they never really remember that she's there.

She loves it.

---

Tuesday is basically the same as Monday.

Steve gets nowhere in his quest to find her, and she watches him while stifling her quiet chuckling.

They don't have any classes together besides P.E, which is divided by gender, and Art. So when she notices him looking around the Art room -he's definitely checking out everyone's artistic skills- with his eyes as he pretends to search for a seat, she sneakily stashes her sketchbook in her bag and exchanges it for a scrap of paper she'd sketched an old tree on yesterday. It isn't as good as her portraits of people...

*Not that it really matters.*

He doesn't even bother coming to the back of the class, where she's currently seated. He just takes a seat on the other side of the room, in the row before hers. Her shaky sigh of relief is let out mentally, just in case he can hear her.

P.E. ends up a disaster though. Not because Steve figures anything out, but because she has to spend some 'alone time' with him in the Nurse's office. He apparently took a basketball to the face, courtesy of Billy Hargrove the dickhead. He takes a seat in one of the chairs off to the side with a towel pressed under his nose. She takes the bed, laying down because her head is throbbing and she can still see little particles in the air. She was knocked over during a game of Volley Ball. Ended up with some *awesome* -note the sarcasm- friction burns on her knees and the palms of her hands, plus a nice red spot on her forehead caused by the floor. That'd been so much fun.

At least it wasn't on purpose. The girl who knocked her over genuinely apologized and helped her off the floor, then lead her to the Nurse and explained what happened before she went back. She even smiled and waved before she left the room.

Now they're alone together. The Nurse left a few minutes to get some ice from the freezer in the Staff Room. She needed a lot apparently, considering they both had wounds that required something cold to stop swelling. She groans and curls in on herself. The splitting headache is one thing, but her knees and hands feel like they're on fire, and to top it all off: she has cramps.

*Today blows*, she thinks bitterly.

There's a loud rattling noise, then a squeak, and finally the sound of a pill bottle being shaken. She turns away from the wall to find Steve at the drug cabinet. No more bloody towel against his face. A bottle in one hand as he shakes a couple pills into the other. He caps it and puts it back, then turns to her and comes over with his hand held out.

"Tylenol. It'll help." He tells her with a small smile.

She sits up and holds out a hand so he can drop the pills into it, then downs them. She doesn't need water, she just wants the pain gone. When they're down, she looks up and smiles at him with a nod, her

version of a 'thank you', before laying back down. She listens as he closes the cabinet, then sits back down in his weird-sound-making plastic chair.

See, he did change for the better. Though she's sure it's something he still would have done back in his 'King' days, only because nobody would see him being a big softy towards one of the weird kids with the door closed.

Maybe her wipe-out wasn't so bad after all.

The cramps *are* though...

---

**I've decided to go slow with this one.**

**I planned out a full week (in the story) for this, with the real dates of December 1984 and everything, 'cause I'm a dork like that.**

**So updates will probably be short and I'm not sure how quickly they'll come, but they" get here eventually.**

**I appreciate (maybe even live for) every Follow, Favourite, and Review given to me as long as they aren't cruel!**

## 4. Chapter 4

Oh, look, another chapter. 1,234 words this time. So it's short but not miniature, which is... good?

\*shrug\*

Have fun!

---

She spends the twenty minutes before her first class out in the parking lot, watching students from both schools arrive as she shivers and scratches out a rough sketch of the Middle School building. The real-world version is decent looking while her drawing is ugly, lumpy where it should be straight, and lopsided. She realizes, with a long sigh, that she'll never be very good at drawing inanimate things. She can barely draw a bowl of fruit; the first thing most Art teachers use as a model. They think it's easy, she thinks it's bullshit.

Of course, she's not at all surprised to see Steve's car roll in and after parking, spew out five excited kids who all yell 'thanks' to him before running away. She watches him watch them. Catches him smiling at them. She smiles at his smile. It's so different from before. It used to seem like a snooty, I'm-better-than-you smile, but now it's not. It's the same smile, but different. She flips the page of her notebook and gets as much of that smile down as possible before he walks away.

Five minutes after that the bell rings. She packs up her things and walks towards the High School as she tells herself to 'look on the brightside', because she /really/ doesn't want to go in there today.

The 'bright side' being the fact that she doesn't have to spend any time around her shitty excuse of a guardian for at least eight hours.

---

First period ends up being a boring lecture on sculpting with no actual work involved, so he falls asleep half way through it and wakes up to a drool-covered forearm by the end of class. Nobody seems to notice, thank God, but he still feels a little embarrassed.

*Great*, he thinks bitterly, *Fucking great...*

. . .

Except *she's* watching, and has to stifle a laugh with her hand to hide that fact.

She notices the spot on his sleeve where the drool soaked in, and watches his face go red when he also sees it. It's a great moment. Then she thinks, suddenly, *maybe this is getting creepy*. Maybe she should stop watching him. Maybe next time she sees him, she should just turn away and not look, or run away. She's being creepy by watching him everyday, and it has to stop.

No, nevermind. Steve is just too funny to stop watching him. He's pretty much her only source of entertainment nowadays, too. Why would she stop all of a sudden?

---

Nothing exciting happens after first period.

Second is Math and she sucks with numbers, so she basically pouts her way through the entire class until the bell rings.

Third period is Science, which isn't too bad. They do more experiments in the last two grades so she's not completely bored. But the first thirty minutes where the old man explains how to do everything? *That* is one of the most unbearable thirty minutes windows of the entire day.

Then lunch happens. The best part of her day. She hides in the Dark Room, drawing while she nibbles on something she brought from home, but she mostly just draws and ends up forgetting that she even brought food. The red light they have to use in that room makes her sketches look neat. It's distracting.

When lunch ends, she ends up having to go to P.E. She's pretty down about it until she feels that horrible twisting pain in her gut and remembers the universal '*Get Out of Gym Free*' card that all girls get when they're older. She uses it to spend time in the Nurse's Office. The woman who works in there loves her, so she's not upset when the teen walks in and sits down. They even talk for a bit. And when the bell rings she gifts the kind lady a portrait of herself sitting at her

desk.

Maybe it's becoming a habit of hers to give people sketches she's done of them...

The next two classes are pretty easy.

She's forced into Home Ec Class, where she has to bake and stuff because she's female and school's are sexist, but at least what she learns there makes her 'Mother' less cranky. Plus, it'll be good to know for when she's on her own. And sometimes she gets to eat whatever she made, so, *bonus*.

And the last one of the day is History. People killing each other because of petty squabbles and bad rumors that got out of hand. She can understand wanting to kill someone because of a betrayal, like a lot of the people in her text book, but she would never *actually* do it. Sometimes the human race astounds her with their stupidity. Then again, peace isn't simple, and humans are prone to destroying anything 'good' that they can get their hands on. Whether they mean to or not.

Instead of listening to the stupid lecture, she spends that last class trying her artistic skill at something a little different than usual.

She draws a dragon, with it's tail looped over it's own body and it's wings wide as it soars through some fluffy clouds. It's got two rows of spikes down it's back and giant sharp-looking claws on it's feet, along with a small fire ball in the middle of being launched from it's open maw full of tiny fangs. When it's done she inspects it closely, thinking *oh wow, I can draw something decent that isn't a real person*. Decent, not great. It's her first attempt at anything mythical.

She folds it twice into a nice little square, then writes a note on what should be the backside of the page.

---

When he opens his locker after the last bell of the day, a piece of paper a lot like the one from last Friday falls out. It even has a note on it like the last one! He excitedly picks it up off the floor, opening it without reading the back.

It's... a dragon?

He flips it over.

*You totally thought it would be you again, didn't you? Ha! Jokes on you, Harrington.*

*I've heard the kids you drive around talking about that fantasy game... 'Dungeons and Dragons' I think. It sounds pretty wicked.*

*Anyways, I figured you could give them this.*

*I'm sure they would love you even if you did, but I'm also pretty sure they love you too much already.*

*Just...*

*maybe erase my rambling before you hand it over, okay?*

-L

*P.S. If you're good, maybe I'll send another one of you.*

*Look forward to it!*

He doesn't really register it at that moment, but his heart skips a beat. Just one.

This girl is so weird and stressful and talented and secretive, and she seems to like picking on him in a sort of nice way; with great drawings and cheeky notes.

And he will *definitely* be erasing that message before he give it to the kids, because he really doesn't need those little shitheads -especially Dustin- teasing him if they see it.

---

**Don't you worry, the story will pick up next chapter. I have things planned...**

**\*evil finger-tapping-pyramid thingy comic villains do when plotting\***

**Just you wait... :D**

**Bye! \*waves\***

## 5. Chapter 5

This is just a mini thing, like Chapter 2, because I like doing the little 'Steve Reaction' chapters.

And because I wanted to do a double update as a thank you to the Fav and Follows I've gotten, along with the super nice reviews I've gotten.

Y'all rock *so hard*, and don't you ever forget it!

So yeah, here ya go~

---

When he drops all the kids off at the Wheeler house, they invite him in too. They know he has nothing better to do and they just like hanging out with him. He's more than happy to come in and chill. Besides, he has a present for them and he wants to hand it over in the presence of their usual D&D area.

Everyone practically runs down to the basement, where they drop backpacks on the floor and drop onto the ratty old couch with a sigh. But Steve stands awkwardly in front of the table, playing with a corner of the folded paper in his pocket, thinking of the best way to word where/when/why/how he got the drawing he was about to give them. He couldn't exactly tell them *he* drew it. Or that he found it. He couldn't even say he bought it, because if he did it wouldn't be folded and wrinkled and in his pocket like a *freaking tissue*.

When Dustin asks him why he's spacing out, he cracks and starts to stutter out the dumbest answer he's ever come up with.

"I, uh- I have this *thing*... It's, um- *oh fuck it, here!*"

He pulls his hand out of his pocket and thrusts it forward, almost nailing the kid in the face with his fist. All of them stand up and crowd around him as Dustin takes it. The process of him unfolding it seems to go in slow motion for Steve. It's so uncomfortable.

"Whoa!"

"Who the hell drew this?"

"Awesome!"

"Is it for all of us?"

"Wicked!"

They all talk at once, then look to Steve for answers. He shrugs. Tells them that *yes, it's for them to share* and *no, he can't tell them where he got it*. They complain and whine so he threatens to take it back with a smile, that's when they shut up and take it back to the couch to look it over together. Little Wheeler even says something about how it can be used in a new campaign.

Steve is just happy because the kids are happy, but also because she was right; they were really happy with it. Just like the first time, he sends out a mental 'thank you' to whoever is being so nice to him, and for including shitsheads this time.

She's way too nice to someone like himself.

Or at least that's what he thinks, seeing as he's got a fairly self-deprecating thought process as of late.

## 6. Chapter 6

Thursday is a good day, but only for shitty reasons.

The good part: 'Mother' is leaving for a couple days, so she can go back to calling the bitch by her name -Zara- and actually hang out at home after school.

On that note... *Zara*? Why would anyone ever pick that? Yes, the old hag picked her own name, and she refuses to tell anyone what it was before. Sometimes she thinks the woman picked 'Zara' because it sounds so horribly stereotypical for someone of Romani descent. In fact, Zara's whole family likes to use the derogatory term for their people, which is 'Gypsy', and she really didn't understand why.

***Gasp!***

They probably aren't even really-

Wait, no, that's not where this is going today. Time to get back on topic.

So, on to the bad side of the day:

Zara's dad, the nicest of her adopted family members and the only one who would step in when Zara was being particularly nasty, died a few days ago. It had been some pretty upsetting news for both of them. And another part of the bad side is that Zara isn't going to bring her go to the funeral. She gets to stay home and work and go to school and *not say goodbye to her adoptive Grandfather*.

It's complete bullshit!

But Zara is leaving so, yeah, it's probably worth it. She'll just hold her own little send off at home where it's quiet. And the hag can't do anything stupid to ruin it.

---

Friday is shit for both understandable *and* stupid reasons.

Usually she likes to blend in, to hide in plain sight by not standing

out too much. She normally sticks to jeans and a t-shirt, adding a hoodie so she can cover her face and stay warm, but today all she can seem to focus on is funeral attire. Her nicest black clothes are thrown across the bed for her to choose from. None of it is really casual enough to be mourning clothes, though. She picks up the simplest dress she has and slips it over her head, fixing the white collar once it's on and straightening the skirt. After that it's a matter of bundling up to survive the December weather.

When she steps into the school she feels like she's being stared at, but ignores the feeling and keeps walking, and instantly regrets every choice she's ever made in her life.

And to make matters worse...

"Miss Romancek!"

She groans when she hears her English teacher call her name from down the hall. She waits for him to get to her, watching as he half-run-half-walks on his stubby little legs. It takes all she has not to turn around and walk away. She's not in the mood to deal with him today.

"Do you have that essay I assigned you?"

"I thought that wasn't due for a week?"

"Yes," he huffs, "but I assigned it *last week*."

*Shit...*

"You don't have it?"

She shakes her head.

"That's the third one in a row." he close to yelling now, "I have no choice but to give you detention."

She says nothing, her jaw dropping a little. All this over a couple stupid essays!?

"You'll be helping set up the Snow Ball after school."

"But I have work today!"

"Too bad. Actions have consequences, you'd better remember that."

He turns and waddles off, and once he's far enough she flips him both the birds with a glare. She shuts her locker a little harder than necessary, then kicks the locker below it too.

*Why is the world out to get her this week?*

She practically slams her forehead against her locker, groaning again. She has to call in now and tell her asshole boss that she needs a day off. It would suck, and he might be even more of an asshole afterwards, but at least Zara couldn't yell at her for it. The woman will never know as long as she doesn't say anything about it.

---

The feeling of people staring at her doesn't disappear until everyone leaves school, but then she's stuck in the Middle School gymnasium with a bunch of teachers, thirteen year old kids, and other teens in detention.

Most of them side-glance at her like she's back to being a side show attraction, while the younger kids look at her with a little bit of fear in their eyes before looking away quickly. The teachers regard her as just another moody teen, thank God.

Mr. Clarke, her favourite teacher from her Middle School days, comes over with a smile and a kind greeting. He's never really been fazed by the weirder students. They exchange the usual 'how are you? It's been so long!' before he gets down to business and hands her a job.

She gets to paint the banner. Yay...

She finds a spot in the back of the room where nobody will be walking around so she can spread out the paper and paints, then gets right to work. It's easy, just the name of the dance and the current year painted in blue, with decorative snowflakes as a back ground. She even snatched some silver tinsel from one of the decoration boxes to use as a border. She knows how over-the-top the teachers want this dance.

The staff puts up sheets of shining silver streamers on basically every wall, hang paper snowflakes the kids made from the ceiling, and fill the food and drink table with stuff that is definitely way too sugary. The Middle School AV club helps set up the DJ station with the help of Mr. Clarke. A couple of kids from the High School are putting together a photobooth sort of thing near the front door.

With all of the chatter it's a little too loud for her to handle, and she wishes she had remembered to bring her walkman today.

A little *Kansas* would do her some good right about now...

"Hey."

She looks up and-

Oh shit, it's Steve!

She looks right back down at the half-painted banner and continues working, "Hi..." she mumbles.

"I was told to come over and help, but it looks like you've got this handled." he explains, "It looks great by the way."

"Th-thanks."

"Do you want help, or should I go ask for a new job?"

"Oh!" she finally looks up again and motions for him to join her, "No, no. Go ahead."

He smiles and takes a seat on the opposite side of the banner, just watching as she does everything. She works slow and carefully, trying her best to make the lines perfect. She's doing a pretty good job, in his opinion. He ends up just sitting there instead of helping and she doesn't seem to mind at all. They spend a few minutes in a awkward silence, the only sounds coming from everyone else in the room.

"We met before, right? In the Nurse's Office?"

She nods but won't look at him.

"Do your knees still hurt? They looked pretty bad."

She shrugs, "I've had worse."

"Oh, okay..."

They lapse back into an awkward silence. Steve is trying to think of something to say, while she's just enjoying the background noise and the sound of her paintbrush scrapping against the paper.

"So... What are you in for?"

"Huh?"

"Did you volunteer or is this a punishment?" he clarifies.

"Oh, yeah. Detention."

"For?"

"Not doing essays."

"Ah."

It's so awkward and he has no idea how to talk to her, but he's trying and that's something right? He's about to ask something else, his mouth hanging open, but a loud screech from the speakers behind them interrupts him. When music starts playing, the AV club cheers.

She cringes. It's that damn song by *The Police* and it hits way too close to home for her right now.

*Every breath you take*

*Every move you make*

*Every bond you break*

*Every step you take*

*I'll be watching you*

She's thinks breathing has become a little harder for her now, but

she's not too sure because the pounding of her heart in her ears and the song are louder than everything else in the room. She never stops painting but her mind is somewhere else.

*Every single day*

*Every word you say*

*Every game you play*

*Every night you stay*

*I'll be watching you*

She always found that creepy. A song about what she assumes is a stalker tailing some poor girl. And now she's thinking: *I'm that creep*. It's a bad enough thought to make her feel sick, or to make her run away. Running would be better. The banner is done so it's not like she would be abandoning her job.

Yeah, let's run.

She jumps up and bolts out of the room, faintly aware of Steve calling after her, asking if she's okay and why she's leaving. She would answer if she could, but it's too embarrassing and she's not in the best place today. She doesn't need this emotional roller-coaster. And she knows there are probably other factors to her emotional instability today, but she doesn't want to pull the PMS card. Not even on herself; it's sexist.

She runs to the closest empty room, shutting the door behind her as quietly as possible. It ends up being a broom closet, she notices, once she's turned the light on. Okay, cool, she can just chill out in here until the dance, where she has to help chaperone apparently.

Awesome.

So her entire afternoon/evening already does, and will continue to, consist of:

- 1) Feeling like shit.
- 2) Feeling like a creep.

- 3) Pure panic because of some stupid song.
- 4) Setting up for a dumb school function that only Middle-Schoolers will be at.
- 5) Keeping a room of twelve to fourteen year old kids from getting too close while dancing. All night.

She makes a weird noise, one she's never made or heard before. It sounds like something an animal might let out when in distress or injured. She hits her head against the brick wall once with a normal human-ish groan.

This is one of those rare moments where she wishes Zara had never retired. Then they could have stayed on the road doing dumb tricks and reading peoples fortunes for money. Those were good times. Then she could have been around for her Grandfather's last few days, and even his funeral.

*Oh, hey there dark thoughts. I was wondering when you'd show up again today.*

One more headbutt to the wall and she leaves, choosing to wait in the Nurse's Office until the dance starts because she needs an ice pack for her head, but also because she wants to hide until she's needed for chaperone duty.

---

The gym is full of loud preteens and even louder music. She stays as far away from the speakers as possible and watches everyone awkwardly dance. A couple people catch her eye; some girls with wild hair, a boy in one of the ugliest suits she's ever seen, a teacher or two who put on way too much make-up.

That one kid who hangs with Steve -she thinks his name is Dustin- comes in with the weirdest hairdo she's ever seen on a boy his age. Just the sides of his extra curly hair have been gelled back, making it look even bigger than usual. It kind of resembles a birds nest. She laughs at the idea of birds nesting in it, laying eggs and protecting their home from him if her ever tried to fix it. That would be the shit.

She's already starting a sketch of him before he makes it to his friends on the other side of the room, where they all stand up and make fun

of him.

She thinks maybe some punch would be great, even if it's too sweet like she thinks it will be, but decides against it when she remembers Nancy is the one serving drinks. After how much of a creep she's been with Steve lately, she doesn't exactly want to go near any of the people she's secretly drawn ever again.

And if that's her new motto she might as well do a quick 'Fancy Nancy' -haha, that rhymes- sketch; her hair all curled and pinned up, wearing a pretty dress that suits her way too well.

She finishes, then starts up one of Jonathan at the photobooth. She does this one from the waist up, his face pushed into the camera and everything. Then a quick one of just his face, with the smile he gives Nancy from across the room.

She's smiling a little herself, too. The night isn't so bad. A lot of people are enjoying themselves. But the song that's playing is horrible. She honestly hates it so much. She has no idea why but *Cindy Lauper's* voice has never been a good sound.

The next song isn't any better. It's *The Police* again. That creepy song that gave sent her into panic mode earlier is just starting up and kids are pairing off for slow dancing. As long as she doesn't see Steve while it's playing she thinks she'll be okay.

She spots his little group of kids as they all pair off for a dance as well, and ends up watching them curiously.

Nancy's little brother seems pretty depressed, sitting at a table with his head down. She doesn't know what's up but her heart goes out to him.

Billy's little sister goes off with one of the boys and it's just *too cute* when they start swaying along with the music. They both grin at each other like idiots the entire time.

Some girl walks over and pulls Will away for a dance, and she thinks *good for him* because he found a girl -*she* found *him*, technically- who won't avoid him. She has to laugh at the height difference, though.

There's a good head of space between the two of them, with Will being the shorter one.

Dustin tries to get a dance with a very snooty looking girl, and that girl snubs her nose at him before laughing with her friends and walking away. She feels a little ball of anger building up in her chest. *How can some girls be so cruel for no good reason?* But Nancy fixes it; Nancy is probably the one who usually fixes things. She dances with him to make a point to the little shit.

When she looks back at mini Wheeler, he's dancing with a girl. *Good*, she thinks. The kid needed to do something other than mope and that girl seems to be the perfect pick-me-up. He's smiling and when they turn she can see the girl smiling too. When they smooch for less than a second she nearly drops her sketchbook, then starts cracking up and has to cover her mouth with both hands to stop the outburst from becoming public.

This is the same feeling she gets when looking at newborn kittens, she realizes. Which is probably the right way to look at adorable children who go to a school function and awkwardly dance with each other an arms length apart.

She looks at the girl one more time and suddenly the hair on the back of her neck stands up.

Yeah, that's enough of that. No more looking at the thirteen year old kids dancing with each other across the room. She does a slightly more detailed sketch of them dancing, foreheads pressed together, closer than they should be.

*Why aren't the teachers breaking them up?*

She shrugs to herself. *Who cares? Give them their moment.* It's awkward enough without an adult stepping in to force them apart.

The dance ends at eight pm, but she leaves at seven-thirty so she can still pick up a few hours at the diner. On the drive there she's nothing but grateful for the fact that she doesn't need a uniform to be a waitress at this place. She doesn't have the time to change if she wants to make any money tonight.

She parks, and is surprised to see Steve's car right next to her own. She hadn't even noticed it was his until she stepped out and got a good look at it.

*Why, universe? Why do you enjoy tormenting me?*

It isn't all bad though. She wanted to give him another drawing anyways, but if she slipped it into his locker he probably wouldn't have gotten it until after Christmas break. She saw this coming, having to find a different place he went to multiple times a day just to give him what she was calling a Christmas present. She had already planned to leave it on his windshield but when she sees the drivers side window open just a crack -what the hell is he thinking leaving the window open during *winter*?!- she decides to push the sandwich baggy with the little bow on it through there, then runs to the door of the diner.

Her asshole boss greets her with a scowl. The cook and other waitress on duty tonight distract him, letting her grab her apron and notepad without a lecture. The diner isn't packed, and she has to beg Wendy to take Steve's table for her, but it's a pretty good night in her opinion.

Even when she gets back to the trailer. She doesn't cry for her Grandfather, who's portrait is in a frame behind a row of candles that she lights once her jacket is off, because she feels like he somehow helped turn her bad day around. She thanks him for his assistance, not caring if he actually helped her or not. It just makes her feel better.

---

How the fuck could he have left the window open in *December*?! That was just stupid and now the inside of his car is probably freezing cold. He shivers as he unlocks and then yanks the door open. Something on the seat catches his eye. A little clear plastic bag, the kind you pack snacks or a sandwich in, sits on the drivers seat. There's a small, shiny, red and green bow stuck to it and some folded paper inside.

He knows who left it there, he just doesn't know when or where. It had to have been recently, or the bow would be flattened from his

sitting on it. It was probably dropped off less than thirty minutes ago. She must have come around and left it, then run away.

He waits until he's home and warm before he opens it. The first thing he pulls out is the note. It's on a separate piece of paper, without any drawings on it.

*Merry Christmas I guess!*

*After tonight it's Christmas break, so I won't be able to drop anything into your locker and you won't be able to check it.*

*I personally don't celebrate it (for a bunch of different reasons) but I'm sure you do, so I figured I would send a gift. You know, in the spirit of things.*

*Before you read more of this, I want you to look at the drawings.*

He complies, dumping the bag out on the couch and going through it. He picks one at random, opens it and stares.

It's Jonathan, wearing the suit he'd been in tonight, standing in front of the camera on it's stand. There's smaller, quicker drawing of his smiling face in the top corner.

He trades it for another.

This one is Nancy. Same hair and dress as tonight, the way she looked when he saw her through the window as he dropped off Dustin. She's smiling and holding a cup out in front of her.

The weirdest part is that these sketches are full body, or at least waist up. She's never done these before.

The third one he picks up is of Dustin. That crazy hair he had tonight was all Steve's fault, but he hadn't said anything because he knew he was to blame. He'd just hoped that nothing went wrong; like being teased or something. The sketch she did looks exactly like he did tonight, and he's smiling in that adorable way that all those little shits do, because they're precious little kids and all precious things smile adorably.

Okay, the Mom-ish thoughts are going too far now...

He goes back to the note.

*Okay, first of all:*

*You and those kids are just perfect together.*

*You're the best big brother they could have asked for, trust me, and that Dustin kid really looks up to you even more than the others.*

*He's a cutie, and the way some people treat him and his friends is just wrong.*

Damn right it is!

*Second:*

*Talk to your friends Steve.*

*I can see that you miss them, and they miss you too.*

*You're alone right now, and nobody should have to be alone like that.*

*Especially during the holidays.*

"Well, maybe if you introduced yourself I wouldn't be alone..." he mumbles sarcastically.

*Seriously, you need those two.*

*You shouldn't just have me, especially since I plan on leaving town once I graduate. You do too, don't you?*

*You won't be getting these much longer and you need people you can talk to, call on the phone, hang out with...*

He sighs and nods. She's totally right, he needs to man up. He's already ninety-eight percent over Nancy and seeing her around doesn't back-track his progress anymore. He should just go over and talk to them.

*I'm sorry I'm such a coward. But it's also me being shy, and I'm really bad at being social.*

*In all honesty I'm not a big fan of humans. They've given me tons of trust issues.*

*Then again, that's usually how people develop trust issues...*

*I'm not such a Special Snowflake after all, huh?*

*Oh well.*

*So yeah, Merry Christmas and all that Jazz.*

-L

*P.S. Here's to hoping I haven't creeped you out yet, or at all.*

That last line has a doodle next to it. Two wine glasses clinking like they're toasting to her Post Script.

He chuckles.

Even when she gets all serious she still finds a way to work in some humor somehow. He hides the gifts in his nightstand with the rest before heading down to the kitchen for a drink, all the while wishing he could give her something in return. Or, again, say 'thank you' to her face.

## 7. Chapter 7

I think y'all will be pretty happy with this one.  
Just barely hit 5,000 words and it's *good*.  
Also, happy December peeps!  
:D

(Alternatively titled: *Big Stuff, Important Stuff* in my Doc Manager)

---

Christmas break passes in the blink of an eye.

Zara comes back after the weekend and makes the break insufferable, but only when she's at home, so she spends most of her time working or at the library. Work is better though. The hustle-and-bustle of people who are too lazy to cook or who just want to go out to celebrate keeps her too busy to think about anything. She's thankful for it. Thinking would be bad right now.

Her mind has been going to very dark places lately.

She wants to stay out of those dark places, so she works and reads and draws and takes care of 'Mother', anything to distract herself.

But, of course, the world just keeps finding ways to fuck with her...

---

It's New Years Eve and she's officially homeless.

It started with one comment, muttered under her breath, so quiet that Zara shouldn't have heard it. But the old woman isn't deaf. She heard it loud and clear from across the Goddamn room. Now, the hag didn't get up at all but she did lay into her 'daughter' from her place on the couch, yelling towards kitchen at the top of her lungs.

And that little fight got out of hand way too fast.

Zara said something -she can't even remember what it was anymore- and it was enough to get her riled up. So riled up that she started throwing things. Every nick-nak, wall decoration, framed picture, or

dirty dish she could get ahold of. She kept up the attack just long enough to get to the bedroom and slam the door, then packed her duffle bag to the brim with everything she thought she would need; including her special collection of sketches and a few other keepsakes.

The bedroom door opens and she pushes past the tiny woman who is throwing profanities at her like it's going out of style. She's unfazed, simply stomping out of the trailer and slamming the door behind her.

"Leave now an' ya ain't comin' back in, ya hear!?" Zara yelled out the kitchen window, her heavy Southern accent suddenly very prominent.

"Fine!" She screams back and flips her the rudest of her five fingers, "Go to Hell!"

That whole thing might have been a big mistake though, because now she's sitting on the side of the road, cold and wet, at ten o'clock on New Years Eve. She spends a long time regretting every decision she's ever made in life while she tries not to cry.

She's been here before. Out in the cold with nowhere to go and a long walk ahead of her. She just can't seem to stand up and use her fucking feet. She almost doesn't want to bother. Maybe she could just wait here until she freezes to death. Sure, it's a dark thought, but she's cheated death twice now. It could always happen a third time.

Or she could just give the damn reaper what he wants.

She shakes her head. No, that's giving up and she can't give up. She *wont*. She's not supposed to go see Grandfather yet.

She keeps sitting there, just not while waiting for her untimely death. She's planning, coming up with a strategy, trying to come up with a place she could stay. She should have made friends after all. If she had, she might've been able to crash at their place for a bit. And maybe have someone to talk to about all this bullshit.

Well, she kind of does, but that's all in one-sided notes with stupid, creepy sketches as compensation.

She groans, dropping her head into her hands.

"I'm such an idiot..."

She sits like that for a few more minutes, constantly sniffing and wiping her nose with her sleeve. Her mind goes back to the darker thoughts, pulling them out to taunt her with, when she's pulled out of her own head by the headlights of an approaching car. A face full of bright light gives her vision little dark spots, her arms going up to shield her face just a few seconds too late. She lets out a string of curses as she blinks away the dots.

The car stops in front of her across the road.

*Why the fuck does Steve show up whenever she feels like shit?*

"Hey, you okay?" He shouts over the sound of the engine.

She stands up, clutching the dufflebag's strap tightly and nodding.

"Fine." She lies, then adds: "Cold." with a shrug.

She refuses look up at him through the whole exchange. Mostly because she still feels like a guilty creep, but also because she's a little embarrassed to be seen the way she is in this moment; looking like a drowned rat. Make-up running down her face and red eyes from crying.

He doesn't care about any of that. He's more concerned about her freezing to death or being hit by a car, maybe even abducted by some old pervert and/or murderer.

"Need a ride home?"

Her head shoots up to finally look at him, surprised and freaking out because, *'yes I need a ride'* but also, *'just not the person I'm basically stalking'*. He looks at her expectantly, waiting for an answer, looking not-at-all impatient. He's must be a fucking saint nowadays.

Then she registers the entire message and shakes her head, "Home's no good."

"Oh, uh, then... need a ride somewhere else?"

Without a second thought she nods, "Thanks."

*No! Shit! Why would you say yes!?* she internally screams at herself as she dumps her bag in the back, then climbs into the passenger's seat.

The drive is spent like most of their interactions: in relative silence. The only noise being the best-of-the-worst pop music the radio is currently spewing. She hates it, but she won't say anything about it. And whenever it crackles into static she catches Steve flinching from the corner of her eye. It would be entertaining if she wasn't so tightly wound at the moment.

"So, um..." he starts, "What's your name?"

She looks over at him, trying to keep her expression neutral. But he's being a responsible driver right now, so he doesn't look back at her. Her silence is enough to get him into 'nervous ramble mode'.

"I mean, we've talked a few times and you don't seem to hate me, but that whole 'running away' thing on Friday was pretty, um, *confusing*. Do I scare you or did I do something to you back in my Asshole Steve days?" He laughs nervously, as if he's trying to make himself feel better by making it sort of a joke. "I wouldn't blame you if you hate me after all that. I was... I was the worst."

"Billy is way worse than Asshole Steve." She tells him.

He gives a small smile, eyes still on the road. "Yeah he is."

He doesn't realize she never answered the question of her name, and he doesn't seem to have connected her to the drawings. Which is nice in a way but also proves just how dense he can be sometimes.

"What, uh, what happened?" He asks with a quick glance at her, "You don't have to tell me, it's really none of my business! I'm just curious..."

This time she's the one to laugh; a small, airy chuckle that catches his attention.

He's such a dork when he interacts with people lately, it's pretty cute.

She folds her hands in her lap and stares down at them with a simple, "Got kicked out."

"Fight with your parents?"

"Yeah." She sighs.

He nods, and they go back to having the radio act as the only sound between them.

She discreetly looks at him from her peripheral, trying to make out the expression on his face, watching the street lights come and go across his features. She wishes she could pull out her sketch book to capture the moment, but it's in her bag which is currently in too awkward of a place to reach for while buckled in. Also, she doesn't feel like showing him that she's his artistic stalker yet. No, she'll keep this in her head until she has a moment alone.

*Why is he so... pretty?* she wonders briefly, followed by a panicked stream of: *No, no, no, no! Shit, what is **wrong** with you?! Stop that!*

"Do you have somewhere you can go?" He asks suddenly.

She mumbles a far-too-quiet "No," and shakes her head.

"Then do you maybe wanna come to, uh, my place?"

She turns, eyebrows raised in question and asks "why?".

He shrugs, "It's just me and my little brother, and it's New Years Eve. Do you really wanna be alone when the ball drops?"

"I don't really mind." she says, then smirks as she asks: "You don't wanna be alone, huh?"

He sputters for a moment as he tries to piece together a lie, even though it's painfully obvious that it's the truth. He gets nowhere with his lie, opting to stay silent, but that only lasts for a minute.

"Okay, fine." he sighs, "Yeah, I don't wanna be alone, and I'm pretty sure my brother is at a friends house tonight."

She nods, just happy that he confessed instead of staying quiet.

"But the other thing is: I don't really wanna leave you out in the cold. It's just cruel."

"Awe, what a sweetheart." She teases and instantly regrets it.

*Where the fuck did that come from?!* she asks herself harshly.

"Thank you. Trying not to let Asshole Steve back out, ya know?"

"I'm sure that Steve is dead." She assures him.

He laughs, and she feels a little less horrible about being such a creep last week. She even considers saying *'Hey, guess what! I'm your stalker that drops sketches in your locker and car! Isn't that awesome?'* and it's all because of his damn laugh! That stupid, adorable laugh...

She feels extremely stupid the second that thought pops up.

Yeah, no. None of that is happening any time soon.

"So, you wanna join me?"

"You don't even know me..."

He shrugs, "Does it matter? We kinda know each other. You even know my name."

She rolls her eyes and smirks, "Everyone knows *your* name."

"C'mon," he whines dramatically, "Let's be miserable together."

It's a tempting offer but she has to say-

"Okay."

-No... She was supposed to say *'No'*.

*Too late now.*

"Sweet. From Injury Buddies to Detention Partners and now Sad Holiday Friends. This is great."

His fake excitement and genuine happiness causes her to full-on grin, his emotions -whether real or fake- are apparently very contagious. Not that she's complaining! In fact, she likes the feeling.

It's not long after that, that they're pulling into the driveway of Steve's house. He parks, turns to her and says 'welcome to Castle Harrington' sarcastically. And he's right. It is basically a Goddamn castle.

Okay, so it's actually a just a really nice rich-person house, but it's like the modern version of a castle. Big fancy front door, lots of extensions off to the side, a big garage, gorgeous front lawn and garden. When she gets inside it's hard to process just how fancy it all is, but she's mostly distracted by the pool she finds through the glass door that leads to the backyard. Steve looks outside too, but he seems pretty uncomfortable when he sees the pool.

She decides not to ask if she can go for a swim.

"You can, uh, get comfy or something. I'll be right back."

She nods, but he's already running upstairs so he doesn't see it.

She drops her bag by the couch and just... kind of stands there. She doesn't know how to 'get comfy' in this fancy-ass house. It makes her feel too dirty; like if she sat on the couch it would go from that nice cream colour to a nasty dark brown just from the contact, or like just by standing there the floor might start to rot. She shouldn't have come here. Just being in this house makes her think awful thing. Not about Steve or his family, but about *herself* and *her* family.

And her family from *before*.

She shakes her head.

*Not tonight, fuckers!* she internally growls, *You wont ruin another okay night for me.*

There's a loud ***bang***, then yelling and more loud ***thumps*** followed by

even more yelling. She has no clue what's going on but she feels like she should check it out. Help solve it, maybe. She runs up the stairs, following the noise to one of the many rooms, where she finds Steve arguing at the threshold of a bedroom -probably his own- and when she peers in she sees the main antagonist of everyone in Hawkins Middle. That damn Troy kid.

The little shit has a bunch of papers in his hands and a cruel smirk on his face, while Steve looks furious with his hands balled into fists at his sides. They're arguing about '*personal space*' and '*weren't you supposed to be somewhere else tonight?*' and '*who's the chick?*'.

*Oh, he means me*, she thinks.

Steve turns and gives her a very apologetic look, then turns back to the kid she assumes is the brother he mentioned in the car. Poor Steve...

She steps closer only so she can see what has Steve's panties all in a twist.

*Oh...*

Troy went through one of Steve's drawers and apparently found the 'gifts'.

*Oh shit...*

"Why do you even keep this shit?" the little fucker snarkily asks, "It's pretty creepy."

When the kid laughs, she feels her face heat up. She's sure she's the colour of a tomato right about now.

"Shut the fuck up." Steve growls.

Those are some of the only things that have made him feel better since the shit-storm that lasted a little under two years, and he won't let his shitty little brother call them all 'creepy'. They aren't creepy! They're... Well, he can't think of a word *right now*, but he's sure he'll come up with something later.

"And they aren't even *good*." he sneers, "Just... scratchy."

"Seriously, shu-"

"And these *letters*? Oh my God..."

Troy starts to read the letter she left in his car after the dance and she visibly curls in on herself a little bit. He only gets through a couple sentences before he starts laughing.

"The creep won't even give you their name, dude. They're obviously fucking with you!"

That's when she snaps. She's never felt so humiliated and angry and just... *hot*. Hot in a bad way. She pushes past Steve, stomps over to the kid and snatches the pages from his hands so fast that he's left gawking at her. He looks a little scared too.

Good.

*Be afraid, be **very** afraid.*

"You know what, you little shit?!" she almost screams, "Get the fuck out before I throw you out a Goddamn window!"

She knows that Steve is probably gawking at her now as well but she's a little too preoccupied with making sure she doesn't come through on her threat of physical expulsion from the house via Steve's second floor window. The kid doesn't move, apparently glued in place. Then the fear disappears from his face and he goes back to being a dipshit.

"Awe, did I offend you?" he sneers.

She doesn't answer, just glares at him.

"Seriously bro, why do you always bring the crazy chicks home?" He asks, peering around her to smirk at Steve.

"Wh-"

"First Wheeler, and now *this*?" He gestures at her.

"Nancy isn't crazy!" Steve shouts, "And neither is-"

"She's crazy enough to go for Byers."

Troy seems a little too pleased with himself.

Steve stands at the doorway, too angry to say anything back.

She leans down so she's at Troy's eye-level, glaring as she says:

"I should really find whoever broke your arm last year and thank 'em. Give 'em a 'thank you' basket and some flowers. Maybe ask 'em to do it again. I'd pay them for it." she gets just a little closer, "Maybe they could break your jaw while they're at it..."

The fear comes back to his face and he tries to hide it, but fails miserably.

"Who should I see about that, exactly?" She asks him in a low, hopefully menacing, tone.

"Don't all you freaks know each other already? You and *that* freak probably do." he replies, "Or are you a 'creep', like Byers? Drawing creepy shit like that!" He points at her hand, the one holding all the pictures and notes.

She freezes up, and wonders for a second why this small asshole of a child is better at putting two and two together than his big brother.

He understands why she's angry at him for all those comments. She was insulted, personally, because she drew and wrote all of those.

*Welp, no turning back now!*

"It's not 'creep'-' *sure it is*, "-or 'freak'-' *actually that works too*, "-or any other name you feel like using. It's- Well, it's none of your fucking business actually." She steps away from him and motions to the door, "Kindly get the Hell out and go to your minion's house already. The big kids want a stress-free New Years Eve. That means 'no prepubescent shitheads'."

The two older teens walk him downstairs like he's a prisoner being

escorted to his cell by guards.

"It's *my* house!" he defends.

Steve puts his hands on Troy's shoulders and starts pushing him towards the front door, "Not tonight."

"I'll tell mom!"

"Yeah, you do that. I don't really care at this point."

"You can always blame the 'Gypsy'." She jokes, pointing to herself with her thumb. "Everyone does."

He laughs through his nose as he opens the door, then pushes his little brother outside, pausing for a second before tossing him a jacket. The door slams shut and Steve sighs as he leans his back against it, then he looks at her and-

*Fuck, he doesn't look very happy right now...*

"So, uh-"

She rubs the back of her neck nervously, searching for the right words to explain anything he most definitely heard while she was fighting with Mini-Harrington.

"They were totally creepy, weren't they?!" she cries suddenly.

The guilt and embarrassment and every other bad things she's feeling in that moment weigh her down so much that she drops. Crouches down right there in front of him. Covers her face with her hands as a warm redness spreads from her neck up to her ears. She knows she looks like any of the red fruits that exist right now.

Steve laughing isn't helping because now she's red for two very different, but still embarrassing, reasons.

*He's laughing at me! Is it angry laughing? Sad? Does he find the state I'm currently in amusing?! Why is he laughing? Oh God...*

Her panicked thoughts spiral until she senses him standing in front of

her before he crouches down too. She peeks through her fingers at him and *oh look*, there's the smile she likes so much.

"They weren't creepy." he tells her, "The first one made me feel a lot better, actually."

"*Oh thank God.*" she whispers.

"And the second one made the Dragon-loving dorks really happy."

"This was all so *stupid*! I'm so so so sor-"

Without warning he wraps his arms around her. She stops breathing for a few seconds, scared for a bunch of dumb reasons and shocked by the physical contact; something she hates with a passion. He doesn't pull away when he says *it's fine, really* so it ends up muffled by her shoulder.

"And the last ones?" she whispers.

"I'm sad to say... I'm the one who gave Dustin the hair advice." He says with a short, breathy chuckle. "And you really nailed Jonathan and Nancy."

"*You* told him to do that?" She asks incredulously, pulling back from the hug to give him an over-exaggerated look of *how could you*. "You? Mr Perfect Hair Steve?"

"Not the style, just what to use." He explains, "I didn't have the heart to tell him it looked weird."

"You're such a mom!" her head falls back as she barks out a laugh.

The extra weight to her backside sends her tumbling down onto her ass, then sprawled out on her back. She didn't even try to catch herself, she just went with it.

"I am *not* a mom!" he argues.

"You can be." she retorts from her place on the floor, "I've seen it."

"I'll bet."

She swallows the lump of nervousness in her throat, "You really aren't creeped out?"

When he takes a minute to think she can feel the panic rising in her chest again, but he kills it with one small sentence.

"It was sweet."

Her face goes back to being Pits-Of-Hell hot.

*This boy will be the death of her*, she swears it.

After she borrows his shower and changes her clothes they spend the hour or so before midnight on the couch, watching dumb TV shows and eating anything they can get their hands on. That includes two pizzas Steve ordered while she was showering, a tub of ice cream she'd never heard the flavor of before, and a couple packs of *Jiffy Pop* she expertly made.

She's pretty sure food hasn't tasted this good in a long time. At least, not since the last 'family' meal she had with her Grandfather.

They talk and laugh and watch the clock together.

"Oh yeah!" he turns to face her so fast that he's almost a blur, "What's y-"

"*Lilith*." she interrupts, "It's Lilith."

His smile is so wide and so bright that she jokes about it blinding her. When he calls her name 'nice' and 'pretty' she feels like steam is rising off her face, maybe even shooting out of her ears. After that, Steve zones out on an episode of *Family Feud* and she takes the opportunity to draw him again; this time looking serious as he stares ahead. He doesn't notice her in the slightest, answering one of the questions the host asks and when it turns out to be right, he celebrates quietly but excitedly in his seat.

She giggles, *why didn't I do this sooner?*

"What's so funny?" he smirks, looking at her from the corner of his eye.

"You."

"How, exactly?"

She shrugs.

"Pffft, whatever."

"Twenty minutes." she reminds him.

"Should we even bother watching the drop?"

She shrugs again, "Your choice." she tells him and continues drawing.

"What are y-"

"You."

He leans over so he can see what she's done so far, "I look *pissed*."

"You look *focused*."

They say nothing to each other for a minute or so before he asks:  
"Why *me* though?"

She wasn't prepared for that question, so she doesn't exactly have an answer. The first sketch just kind of happened out of the blue, the second sketch after she thought tracking his healing process would be an interesting challenge, and the rest followed like that.

The first one she gave him was one she did while he was chatting with the kids at lunch last month. His face had almost completely healed by then, his bruises barely visible from where she was sitting at the time. She thought he looked like an action movie protagonist during the epilogue, where everything is back to normal and they're about to wrap-up the whole film. He looked 'heroic' and that's what she told him, in a way.

*I'll continue to assume your busted face was the result of some heroic act,* she'd written.

"Because you're interesting." she tells him without looking up from

the page.

"That's it?"

She nods, then flips back in her sketchbook a few pages to find the sketches she did of his face while he was healing and hands it to him, scooting closer so she can flip the pages for him; she doesn't exactly want him looking through the entire thing.

"This was the first week."

He flinches and grimaces as he looks over just how bad it had been. Looking at himself in the mirror was one thing, but seeing it in black and white, in her art style, made it seem so much more painful.

"This was the week after that."

Okay, this one isn't so bad. His eye was able to open again when she drew it, and his bruised face had lightened up a little bit. It still looked pretty bad though.

"This was the third."

Ah, mostly back to normal at that point. It looked like he'd taken a single punch to the face, instead of a collection of them accompanied by a plate smashed over his head, all coming together to cause that horrible concussion.

"What about the week I was totally healed?" He asks, smirking when he sees her cheeks turn pink.

She gets up and walks over to her bag, digging through it until she lets out a quiet 'ah-ha' as she pulls out a plastic folder. It's blank. No label, no picture, nothing. But it's full of stuff.

The drawings inside are amazing.

She shows him the important ones first. The sketch of the fourth week where his bruises were finally gone and he looked like *him* again, the special one of Nancy and the other special one of Jonathan, Hopper asleep at his desk - "Don't ever show him this!" he warned through a fit of laughter- the sketch of her Grandpa with

added wrinkles.

There are others in there as well. Sketches that aren't as special but that she still wants to protect. The one she did of Nancy's little brother dancing with the girl who made her hair stand on end, the one she drew of Barb's face from memory only, the stray cat that stopped coming around her place last week, a half-finished family portrait type-of-thing of faceless parents and a faceless older brother with a little girl wearing a sour expression in the center of it all.

He laughs at her sad excuse for a tree.

"Hey," she smacks him on the arm, "it was my first try!"

At ten minutes until the ball drops, they watch the tail end of a *Looney Toons* episode because there's nothing even remotely exciting to do until the main event.

With two more minutes until midnight they flip the channel to the Ball Drop Ceremony just for the Hell of it and settle down with the rest of the popcorn. Nothing is said, but it's not the awkward or uncomfortable silence that used to pass between them. Now it's comfortable, pleasant, enjoyable even. This kind of silence could last forever and they wouldn't care much.

The waiting is boring, but then the apple-shaped ball finally makes contact with the giant 1985 neon light on the roof of the building and everyone on the screen cheers, the two of them exchanging the traditional 'Happy New Year' as well. She knows there's another tradition that most people follow through on, but she's too shy and doesn't know how he might react.

So she leans over to give him a quick peck on the cheek before sitting back down, her own cheeks flaming hot.

He gets this look, as if he's been slapped right across the face, and she bursts into a fit of unladylike laughter at the sight. Both of them are red now, and laughing, and happier than she thinks either of them have been in a long time.

He invites her to stay the night using the excuse of '*it's too cold and*

*dangerous for you to spend the night out there all by yourself* and she argues that she can definitely take care of herself, but he insists and she ends up giving in a little too easily. Probably because he kept giving her that smile whenever he tried to convince her.

*She'll always give in to that smile.*

---

**Please excuse the dumb way she ended up telling Steve she was the artist.**

**It was extremely stupid, wasn't it?**

**Well, excuuuuuuse the Hell outta me for writing dumb shit at 2 am when I haven't slept in almost a full day!**

**No wait, it's 4 am...**

***Fuck.***

**Excuse me as I go drop face first onto my couch and sleep with my only friends: my dogs.**

**Bye-bye~**

## 8. Chapter 8

She sleeps on the couch that night because neither teen is worried about Steve's family coming home to a surprise guest. His parents will be gone for a few days and Troy will probably spend most of tomorrow at his friend's house.

She's grateful for the privacy of the empty livingroom when she wakes gasping and sweating and searching her surroundings for threatening shadows after a nightmare.

---

*Low guttural groans and high-pitched screeches, accompanied by a clicking noise.*

*She runs and runs and runs but it's always three steps behind her, sometimes in front of her, almost like it can teleport.*

*She doesn't always see it, but she can't avoid the noises it constantly makes.*

*And then it's there, standing in front of her.*

*All terrifyingly lanky limbs, disgusting grey skin, and claws that could and most likely **will** kill her.*

*It's featureless face opens like a blooming flower to reveal row upon row of little tiny fangs as it roars at her.*

*She **wants** to run.*

*She **tries** to run...*

*But her feet won't move!*

*It hunches down, then leaps at her with it's maw open and she knows this is the end.*

*Everything goes dark as pain erupts from her midsection.*

---

She hates that nightmare, but it's not the worst. She's had *far worse* nightmares than that. Ones with blood and guts and betrayal. Things that would seem like nothing to some people, but meant everything to her.

She doesn't even realize she's on the verge of hyperventilating.

When she calms down enough she gets up, taking her blanket with her upstairs. She needs to at least be near someone if she wants to sleep at all tonight. She doesn't need to share his bed, the floor at the end of it would be fine.

She pauses outside his door to ask herself if she's being stupid, because she feels stupid and childish and just...

*Deep breath.*

She sighs, then slowly opens the door. She could hear him snoring through the door, but now she hears it even clearer and she has to stifle a laugh.

Steve is sleeping on his stomach, his right arm and leg hanging off the same side of the bed, his bare back the only thing she can really make out in the dark. She takes a couple steps in, shutting the door just as carefully slow as when she opened it. The 'click' of it latching is still loud enough to wake him up, but not completely. He mumbles out a couple questions as he lift his head off the pillow to lazily look around the room.

"Lil'th?" he asks groggily.

"I, uh- I'm just guna be over there." She whispers, pointing to the floor at the foot of his bed.

"Why?"

*Oh why the fuck not?* "Nightmare."

He grumbles something unintelligable, then pats the big empty space next to him.

"C'mon. Bed. No floor."

She would laugh if she wasn't so surprised.

"Waiting..." he tells her.

"*Ohrightthanks.*" She says in a single breath.

She gently climbs onto the empty side of the bed, pressing herself as close to the edge as possible without falling off, but then his arm warps around her waist and pulls her closer to the center. Closer to *him*.

Suddenly she can't breathe very well.

His arm retracts and leaves her there.

"Won' do 'nythin'." he mumbles.

"I know."

"Good."

She carefully flips herself over to look at him, surprised that he's facing her already. He seems to be asleep so she feels a bit like a creep again. She even thinks, *if only I had my book* when she sees the peaceful look on his face. Yeah, creepy.

"Wh' wassit 'bout?" he asks suddenly, causing her to nearly jump backwards off the bed.

"Um, a... monster." It was definitely a monster, she just didn't know which one. "Nightmares always happen when I sleep alone."

"Don' y' us'lly sleep 'lone?"

His weirdly worded sentences come from a mix of his cheek being squashed into the pillow and the sleep still weighing his tongue down. It makes her smile a bit.

"I had to share the bed with my mom. There's only one in the trailer."

He gives a single nod and they lapse back into a peaceful silence. She's about to close her eyes and try to sleep when he speaks again.

"Hey, Lil?"

*Lil?* she muses, "Yeah?"

"Thanks."

"For what?" She giggles.

"Thinkin' I could be th' good guy when I've been th' bad guy fer s'long."

"Well, then thanks for not thinking I'm a stalker."

"Nah, yer definitely a stalker." He tells her, a little more lucid this time around. "But th' good kind. Th' cute kind."

Okay, maybe he's not *lucid* but he's definitely less slur-y than before.

"Good to know." She pats him on the back lightly, "G'night, Steve."

"Night, Lil."

No more nightmares come to visit this time around.

---

I got this idea while working on the last chapter and I hope you guys don't hate me for the whole '*Demogorgon Dream*' thing.

(Y'all could tell I was describing the Demogorgon, right?)

There was a different nightmare I was guna use, but I didn't wanna throw that in your faces like '*take that bitch, ha HA!*' because I'm a decent person.

Kinda...

So berate me, crucify me, or praise me and ask for more.

I don't really *care* which one you choose, I just hope it's the *kind* choice.

Peace out!

\*smooches\*

## 9. Chapter 9

I call this one "*Let's Pull a 'Mike Wheeler'!*" for a few reasons. But it's Alt. title is: "*The Many Mood-Swings of Lilith Romancek.*" Thank you to everyone who stuck around this long because in all honesty, I've kind of lost the gumption to write anything else for this, and that worries me.

---

Steve had never been happier about his parents going away for a week than in that moment when he woke up next to Lilith.

*Lilith.*

He finally learned her name, finally met her, finally talked to her. He knew she was real now. He even saw her in action last night, sketching out a stupid face he was making at the television.

But why is she in his bed?

Oh, right. She had a nightmare last night and she came in to sleep on the floor, but he sleepily invited her into his bed. Why should she sleep on the cold floor when he gets a warm bed? That didn't seem fair.

She accepted the invitation, and he hazily remembers her sticking to the edge of the mattress like her life depended on it, then he grabbed her around the waist with one arm and pulled her clos- *Oh God*, did he really do something that embarrassing while he was half asleep?

*Yes, yes he did.*

He groans and rolls onto his back so he can look up at the ceiling while he mentally berates himself. Lilith moves too, but stays asleep thankfully. He doesn't really want to face her right now with how red he is and how little he's wearing.

When he looks at his alarm clock and sees how early it is, he rolls over to face the window and falls back asleep.

---

The next time Steve wakes up he finds the other side of the bed empty and cold.

*Please, don't let everything last night be a dream!*

In a panic Steve forgets to put on a shirt, jumping around in an effort to get a pair of sweat pants on, then runs downstairs. She isn't in the kitchen, or the living room, the shower isn't running either. But when he hears a splash and looks out the patio door, he finds her in the pool.

She's lazily backstroking across the water, looking more relaxed than he's seen so far.

Ever since Barb disappeared Steve has never felt safe near that pool, because that's where the Demogorgon nabbed her, and that little bit of fear is directed at Lilith now. He knows the 'Gate' is closed, but what if... He throws open the sliding door and tries his best to look casual as he walks out into the cold air of a January morning. She doesn't notice him right away, so he takes the opportunity to watch her float for a bit.

"You're staring."

He jumps, not expecting her to know he was there. Did she hear him come over, or could she sense his presence? One deep breath and he's able to speak, finally.

"What are you doing?"

"It's a family tradition to pool hop in rich neighborhoods on New Years Day." she explains, then flips over and swims towards the edge. "But since I slept here, I figured I'd just do the one pool this year."

"Sounds weird and kinda risky. You ever get caught?"

"Only once. My cousin is a loud drunk." She looks up at him and smirks, then grabs the leg of his pants and tugs lightly. "It's no fun by myself."

"I'm not going in there."

"Chicken. You know it's heated, right?"

Yeah, he knows that. He remembers the steam that came off the water that night at the party, and throwing Nancy in while Tommy and Carol were already splashing around. He remembers the same steam in the background of the picture Jonathan took of Barbara, the same picture with the Demogorgon lurking off the side in the treeline.

"No, I'm good."

She sighs, "Fine, help me out then."

In retrospect, he should have seen her betrayal coming the second she held her hand out to him. When he takes her hand she pulls it back as hard as she can, and he goes tumbling face first into the warm chlorinated water, then comes up sputtering and pushing his wet hair out of his eyes.

He glares, she cackles like a madman.

Then he cracks up too, because her laughter is apparently very contagious.

"You're a jerk." He tells her.

"I can be, yes." She replies with a shrugs, "But only to my friends."

He sinks under water for a few seconds to hide his grin.

---

"Only one more week." He grumbles.

They'd gotten out of the pool and dried off, then decided to camp out in the living room for the rest of the day to watch movies and just be couch potatoes. That was when Steve finally remembered that school existed, and that they had to go back to it on Monday.

"Well, at least we can talk now."

"True."

"And we have two classes together."

"We do?"

She nods, "P.E. and Art."

"I'm failing Art."

"Her teaching methods and projects are all bullshit. I'd be failing too if I didn't have practice."

"Oh, so it's not me, it's the teacher?"

She nods again.

"Sweet. I should tell her that."

She pushes him with her foot, her hands preoccupied by a pencil and sketchbook.

Once they were mostly dry she asked him to sit and pose for the first time. All he needs to do is stay still at a certain angle so she can try to make it *perfect*. He didn't argue when she brought it up because he thought it would be a good chance to talk while she did what she loved. They ask each other childish questions, make dumb jokes, and tell stupid stories from when they were small. Steve's stories have more details than Lilith's, but he doesn't seem to notice or care.

She stretches her legs out, laying them out across his lap. When he gives her a look she simply smiles and wiggles her toes. He doesn't move her or tell her not to touch him, just leaves them there and goes back to posing. The music videos playing on the television are loud and jumpy, with highly upbeat tunes but weirdly pessimistic lyrics, and she hums along while she draws.

It's a comfortable morning of doing basically nothing.

---

They take a break at around noon, hungrier than they thought they would be, which is understandable when you skip breakfast. Neither of them want, or have the energy, to make anything so they change into clothes better suited for being in public and take a drive until

they find a diner that isn't overflowing with hungover parents and noisy children.

The drive ends up taking a while and they settle for the diner where Lilith works. It's practically empty and she assures him the food is decent and pretty cheap. Her boss scowls at her when she walks through the door, but changes his expression when he notices Steve behind her. He has to put on his best face for a customer, right? And since there's no one else to take their order he does, with a shitty attitude towards his employee and a decent one towards the boy with her.

They order and eat, once again slipping into a comfortable silence.

As they were leaving Lilith was asked into the back for a quick chat with her scowling asshole of a boss. She asks Steve to wait by the car, then rushes to the kitchen door. Steve stands there, confused for just a moment before he walks out to his car. He's been waiting for a good five minutes now...

He freezes when he sees Nancy and Jonathan heading his way.

"Yeah, this is turning into a *great* day..." he grumbles.

Sure, he agreed with what Lilith said about talking to them again. He just doesn't want to do it right now, out here, while waiting for said advice-giver. He doesn't have a choice in the matter, though, because Nancy sees him and drags Jonathan by the wrist to meet Steve by his car.

"Steve." she says with a smile.

Yeah, okay, he could give in just this once. She's too sweet to avoid for so long.

"Hey, Nance." he nods, "Jonathan."

"Happy New Year." Nancy says for the both of them. "Did you come out for lunch?"

"Uh, yeah. Just finished act-"

"Fuck you!"

The trio turns, Steve instantly recognizing Lilith but not expecting her to be the owner of the angry voice. She's backing out of the diner with both hands up, middle fingers raised, her face twisted into an expression he hadn't seen on her yet; absolute fury

"Lil, what the hell?!" he shouts to her.

She stomps over to the car and hops into the passenger's seat without a word, slamming the door harder than necessary. He leans down to look in the driver's window. She's crossed her arms and glares out the windshield at the diner window. He has to sigh, *just has to*, because this was definitely not how he wanted today to go.

Temporarily forgetting about his friends even as they stand next to him, he opens his door and bends over so he can properly see Lilith's face.

"What happened?"

"He's a jackass!"

"But how?"

Lowering her voice, she simply says: "He's a perv..."

That's all Steve needed.

"I'm guessing that was your 'two weeks'?"

She nods.

"Good."

Suddenly, Jonathan and Nancy aren't invisible anymore and Steve stands back up to say goodbye before he climbs into the car.

"I'll see you guys later, kay?" He tells the couple, and they nod, so he starts the car and drives off.

As they drive Steve keeps giving Lilith side glances. She looks

absolutely pissed, so he feels like asking her anything else about what happened right now would be like poking an angry bear; not a wise decision.

Then again, he's not exactly the smartest guy out there.

"Did he, like, grope you or something?"

"I would let *that* go."

*Okay, confusing, but totally her choice.* "Then what did he do?"

"What he always does." she looks out the window, resting her forehead on the cold glass. "Just in a less... sneaky way this time."

"And that is...?"

She makes a sort of growling noise; like a mix between a frustrated grunt and an annoyed groan.

"Lil."

"Basically, every week I get shit. He tells me I'm doing a bad job or accuses me of stealing from the register. The other staff defend me but..."

Steve nods.

"And every time it happens he tells me that I can 'fix the problem' with this *disgusting* look on his face!"

Fix the probl-

Oh!

Oh...

Steve's eyes darken, she watches it happen. He understood what she meant, even though she wouldn't say it outright.

"Fuck him, then."

"Excuse me?!"

"Not like *that*." He rolls his eyes, "Just... I really wanna punch him right now, okay?!"

She smirks and shows him her right hand. "I already did."

The knuckles red and probably going to bruise later and spattered with blood. Blood that isn't hers. She says she hit his nose so hard that it almost sprayed her down like a damn hose. She had to avoid the fountain of blood after the '*satisfying **crunch** of cartilage breaking*'.

That's a direct quote, by the way.

She just might be one of those quiet psychos he's heard about. But, hey! As long as he doesn't piss her off that badly, he'll never be on the receiving end of her rage, right? Yeah, that's right. Steve's going to do his best to stay in Lilith's Good Graces.

"Does it hurt?"

"A bit." She shrugs, "It just needs ice."

"Do you have a back up plan? Like another job waiting or-?"

"I kind of don't need one anymore, I guess." She shrugs, "I only worked 'cause my mom wouldn't."

"Oh."

"Yeah."

There's a pause in the conversation, going back to being uncomfortable silence for the first time in a while, and Steve breaks it because *no, they're not doing this again* but also because he has questions.

"If you can't go home, is there somewhere else you can stay?"

She shrugs, apparently her go-to answer for most things. "I'll figure it out eventually."

No. No, that's not okay. She should be in a house or even that trailer, dry and hopefully warm. It's not fair that she had to do everything for

that crazy woman just to get kicked out on her ass. There are no motels in Hawkins, and he knows from a talk they had that she doesn't have any friends to stay with. She can stay with him for now, but there's no way his parents will let her stay when they get back.

Then again...

They barely notice anything he and Troy do, only getting upset when they're children are severely hurt; like Troy's arm and how she reported it to the police, and Steve's face after his fight with Billy. And hey! Mike hid a Telekinetic girl in his basement for a week and his parents never noticed, even though they pay more attention to their kids than Steve's parents do.

How hard could it be to hide Lilith in his room, a place nobody but Steve enters when he's home?

The answer: not very hard.

---

Troy coming home and staying home is a struggle at first. Every time he and Lilith cross paths they practically growl at each other; like dogs defending their respective territories. Anytime Steve sees it starting he comes over to whisk Lilith away before she can do anything. He knows she could beat his little brother in a fight, not because she's older or a bit bigger than him but because Troy is actually a wuss. He only picks on people smaller than him that he knows won't fight back.

One day he actually catches them in the middle of a shouting match and has to physically separate the two of them. He puts himself between them, pushing Lilith back a couple steps, then turns to Troy to hand him some cash and tells him to go do something else somewhere that isn't there.

The little shit happily leaves.

After that, Steve has to sit Lilith down and give her the 'How To Not Let Troy Piss You Off' crash course. He really can't have them fighting everyday, it takes too much out of everyone involved.

He's left wondering why Lilith is so calm, quiet and shy most of the time and then, when someone like his little brother shows up, she gets weirdly aggressive and confident. It's a bit confusing and maybe even a little concerning, because nobody should change that easily, but she's fine most of the time so he doesn't dwell on it.

## 10. Chapter 10

**Have another short/cute thing because my wife is awesome at giving me ideas and motivation for this fic.**

---

She tells herself she needs to grow up, to sleep on her own for once. She's seventeen for God's sake! She can't keep crawling in with someone whenever she has a bad dream.

She tells herself that, but she doesn't follow through.

After a particularly terrifying nightmare about monsters and blood, much worse than the usual deformed creature-feature, she's left panting and soaked in fear sweat. Once she's calm enough to think Lilith tells herself just how pathetic she is and that she should be over bad dreams about monsters by now. But she isn't and the nightmares are too vivid to get over so easily.

She creeps upstairs to Steve's room and tries her best to stay quiet as she closes the door behind herself. Steve is in his bed, obviously, but he doesn't look like he's sleeping. He moves, then flinches, and makes a strangled whimpering noise.

*Nightmare...*

She wants to laugh at the strange coincidence.

Instead she makes her way to the bed, sitting on her knees next to him as he tosses and turns, studying his face to try and figure out how bad the nightmare is. She needs to know if it's worth it to wake him up, or if he should just ride it out. It doesn't take long for her to decide that waking him up is the best idea. She shakes his shoulder and he doesn't open his eyes so she shakes harder, but that just makes him roll onto his side. Now he's facing the window, still twitching and murmuring.

She sighs and shakes him even harder, and that's when the dream gets worse. His eyebrows crease just before his eyes fly open, and his arm comes up and out to defend him self from the monster he thinks

is there.

The back of his tightly clenched fist collides with her jaw, sending her tumbling off the edge of the bed with a surprised yelp and a thud.

After a few seconds of catching his breath, Steve realizes what he just did.

"Shit, fuck, Lil!" He scrambles to the edge of the bed, finding her on the floor with a hand to her stinging cheek. His apology comes out as a single word instead of a proper sentence. "OhmyGodI'msorry!"

She giggles a little as she stands, then plops down on the bed next to him. His voice becomes higher with every sentence. She sits down next to him, as calm as can be

"Are you okay?"

"Calm down."

"I just *backhanded* you!" He's dangerously close to screeching now, "With my *fist*!"

"You hit like a little girl." She deadpans.

"That's not the p- Hey!"

She smiles at him. A small, sad smile that helps him calm down just a little.

"I had a nightmare." She states, "And so did you."

"That's, um, really weird, in a kinda cool way."

"Monsters?" She asks.

He nods, "Yeah."

"Me too."

That's all they really need to say. They don't ask each other for details, or directly comfort each other with words, but Steve does apologize a couple more times. They simply lay down next to each

other and talk about stupid things; like Steve's stories about the kids, and Lilith telling him about some of the interesting things she's seen while living on the road.

Eventually they fall asleep. Lilith goes first, in the middle of a sentence and Steve makes sure she didn't just pause for no reason. He falls asleep a little while later while staring at the red mark by her mouth that *he* put there. It may have been an accident, but he still feels like a major jackass for doing it. He'll figure out a way to make it up to her tomorrow though.

## 11. Chapter 11

Three days! That was the longest break I've ever taken between chapters for this fic. Sorry it took so long, I had a pretty bad case of writers block at the same time as not really *feeling* the fic anymore. But I'm back and ready to write now!

I'm trying to make it up to you guys with a 2,000+ word chapter, is that good enough?

So here, have some Apologetic Steve and Vicious Lilith!

Dedicated to 3CHOES for their sweet reviews and overall niceness. All of it makes me feel better when I'm down on myself and this fic. Thanks to you, sweetness!

---

She's aware of the pain before she's even awake.

She ignores it for as long as she can before it wakes her up completely, and she gets out of bed to go check her face in the bathroom mirror. Sure enough, the spot where Steve's hand connected with her cheek is a dull purple. It looks more like she had an accident than someone hit her. She touches the light purple splotch and winces.

Whatever he had been fighting in that nightmare must have been *terrifying* to make his flail that hard.

She rubs her tailbone, trying to work out the soreness from the fall that came after the fist. Her current bruises aren't as bad as some of the stuff she's been through before but it still hurts quite a bit. She stretches as well, hands on her hips as she twists the top half of her body left to right, then arches her back until it pops in a good way. She sighs in relief. Steve's extra comfy bed is way too soft compared to the shitty mattress in her trailer that she's used to, and her sore back after sharing it with him is proof of that.

"Lil?"

She turns to find a very dejected looking Steve in the door of the bathroom, staring at the towel bar on the left wall. She smiles when he finally looks at her, but it falters when a look of shock crosses over

his face.

"Oh my God..." he whines when he sees the barely-there bruise, "Does it hurt? Do you need ice?"

It hurts a little but she doesn't think it requires ice, and Steve needs to calm the Hell down. She's a big girl -if you ignore the 'crawling into bed with him when she has a nightmare' thing- and she can handle herself just fine.

"Dude, chill." She says softly, taking a few steps towards him. "I'm fine."

"But-"

She gives him a look and he stops talking instantly. Arguing over something like this will get them nowhere, they both know that.

He closes the gap between them with one long step forward, looking at her for a second before he takes her face between his hands. She stops breathing, the cogs in her brain stops working and her face heats up as internal panic alarms start blaring. She closes her eyes, hoping that it might help her calm down a bit.

*Too close, too close, too close!*

He brushes his thumb over the bruise and despite how it barely made contact with the discoloured skin, she still feels a twinge of pain.

*Shit, shit, shit, shit...*

She opens her eyes. He's looking down at her with puppy-dog eyes and a half smile that makes her melt in a weird way, and she lets out a content sigh.

*Cute, cute, cu- No, stop it!*

She clears her throat awkwardly. His hands drop to his sides. Both of their faces are red now.

"You really wanna make it up to me?" She asks, just to get rid of the awkward silence; she doesn't actually want anything.

"Definitely." He replies.

"Buy me breakfast."

He smiles down at her, "That's it? You're not gonna, like, hit me back or something?"

"You get beat up at least once a year, I think that's enough." She smirks at him, "Plus, I don't believe in 'an eye for an eye'."

"*One breakfast* doesn't make up for a bruised face!"

"You're letting me live rent-free in your house, risking an eternal grounding because the 'rents aren't in on it." She shrugs, "I think *that* and a really good breakfast would even it out."

He gives up with a sigh, and tells her to go get changed. "We leave in twenty."

She gives him a double thumbs up and a wink as she walks into his bedroom backwards to get some fresh clothes. He follows her to get his own, stopping dead in his tracks when he catches her in the middle of undressing. He backs out and closes the door. She didn't even close the door! What kind of girl does that *with a guy in the house*?!

The wait for his turn isn't long. She comes back out ten minutes later in clean clothes and fresh make-up.

Why she she always wears baggy sweaters, ripped jeans, and thick black eye make-up Steve will never understand, but she rocks it every time. And who is he to mess with what works?

He doesn't take as long to change and then they're off, two minutes down the road from his house when he asks her where she wants to go. She just shrugs. There are only three diners in or around Hawkins to choose from! How can she not know or care about where they go?

The diner Lilith used to work at is a no-go on account of her punching the boss before she quit. And the place that used to be Benny's is okay, but the new guy just isn't as good as Benny was. Plus, it's a few minutes outside of Hawkins and Steve doesn't want to

go that far just for food. With the other options crossed off his mental list they end up at a small place in the downtown area. It's cute and almost completely empty, and he knows they serve some pretty wicked food. Especially on slow days, when they don't have to rush through making all the food.

They grab a booth in the back, order four different kinds of pancakes, and relax while they wait.

Steve goes back to staring at the bruise next to Lilith's mouth, guilt suddenly heavier in his chest than before. How were pancakes supposed to make up for that? He saw her cringe when he barely even touched the darkening spot earlier. It hurt, of course it hurt, he was swinging full-force at a lunging *Demodog* but hit *Lilith* instead.

Lilith has her sketchbook out in front of her as usual, etching out the starting lines of the waitress across the room as she cleans a table. He guesses that most of the time her sketches are done just to keep her skills sharp, and that the others are more special; like she planned them or spent hours on them. He isn't sure if he's right but he likes the idea.

Her hand stills and she looks up to get another eye-full of the waitress. But instead of looking back down to resume her drawing, her now wide eyes focus on something else and follow it along the room. She looks one part scared and another part surprised.

"What's wrong?" He asks.

She's staring at five fairly familiar faces. She can't remember the names of two of them, but the other three she will always recognize. They're on her list. The list of people she can't stand.

Tommy and his girlfriend Carol are sitting next to Billy, along with the two nameless girls that followed them in.

Steve starts to turn so he can see what she sees, Lilith now realizing just how grateful she is that Steve took the seat with it's back to the door. She stops him by leaning across the table and grabbing his chin, turning his face to hers.

"Don't." she orders, her voice dropping an octave. "This morning has been good so far and I want it to stay that way."

"Who's back there?"

She lets go of his chin and sits back down, "Hargrove and the usual pricks."

He grumbles something she doesn't quite understand, then sighs.

"That just means we get to hang here for a while, at least until they leave. And here is better than home with your little brother."

He cracks a smile again, "True."

Apparently 'a while' meant 'two hours' because that's how long they waited. They ate the original four orders of pancakes, then ended up getting another out of sheer boredom. Lilith goes through the last few pages of her sketchbook practicing inanimate objects, as well as trying to teach Steve how to draw less like a four year old.

She slides into the spot next to him, boxing him in, to make it easier for her see what she was teaching him. Neither of them were going to complain about to the new closeness; shoulder to shoulder and sometimes Lilith's hand around Steve's to guide it.

"Awe, how cute." A voice coos.

They both freeze, then look towards the owner of the voice. Of course it's the people they were actively avoiding by loitering in the back for so long. And the first of them to speak had been the open-mouth gum-chewing Carol. The noise grates on Lilith's nerves, and she isn't sure she'll be able to control herself if it continues.

"New girlfriend already, Stevey?" She asks, Tommy coming up to rest his arm over her shoulders and laugh along.

Lilith clenches her fists under the table, counting to ten in her head and taking deep breaths. Steve huffs and looks away from his former best friends.

"You're being sorta rude, Harrington." Tommy sneers with a smirk.

Billy, being the biggest ass of them all, slides into the empty bench that used to be Lilith's seat and smiles at them. It's a disgusting smirk that makes her skin crawl, which she guesses was his intention.

"She's cute, gotta admit that." He says, voice sickly sweet. "What're you two doing back here?"

Before either of them can respond or protest, Billy slaps his hand down on the sketchbook and slides it towards himself. Lilith has to hold back the animalistic growl that threatens to come up, clenching her jaw as hard as she can to keep everything in. Steve glares at him and clenches his own jaw as Tommy and Carol slide in too.

Billy is already flipping through her book with that nasty smirk still on his face.

"Woowow," he gives a low whistle as he turns another page, "These are pretty good."

Carol leans over to see what he's looking at, "Looks like nobody knew they were posing for these." She smack her gum again and it makes Lilith twitch.

Tommy laughs, "So, first Byers and his camera, now girly over here and her pencil. This town is full of stalkers, huh?"

"I'm actually kind of insulted that you didn't draw *us*." Billy says, gesturing to the three of them.

Steve grabs her wrist under the table as if to say 'it's fine, stay calm' but she isn't listening. She narrows her eyes and unclenches her jaw, pushing Steve's hand away so she can bring her fists up and slam them hard against the tabletop.

"There's a list of people I won't draw for a bunch of reasons. You're on that list, Hargrove." She looks to the couple and nods once, "You guys, too. And the only time I've really seen you, Billy, is when you're being a downright *douche* to everyone around you. Same with them. I'm not wasting paper or led on people like *you*."

Their smirks disappear, turning into glares and frowns.

She rips her sketchbook out from under Billy's hands, then leans over the table to grab her bag from between him and the wall and stuffs the book inside it. She stands to leave, but stops suddenly and slams her hands down on the table. Her glass of water falls over and splashes Billy's chest and lap, even though the table never shook. The syrup container copies the glass, tipping over to pour its contents all over the gross 'love-birds' next to him.

So she didn't control her temper very well, but they deserved that and much worse.

"You ever screw with us or your little sister and her friends again, and I'll be on your ass so fast you won't know what hit you." She lowers herself a bit, hands still on the table, and stares right into his eyes. "You hear me?"

He glares back at her and flicks some of the water on his hands at her. She doesn't blink or flinch, even when some of the water hits her face.

"Glad we understand each other, *King Dipshit*."

She grabs Steve by the arm and drags him out of the diner, leaving the three assholes at the booth to pay for their food. Sticking the bullies with the bill wasn't intentional, but she knew they wouldn't be allowed to leave until money was left for the order. And the waitress was sort of Lilith's friend, a nice older woman that sometimes gave her free food when she was short on cash when she was younger. She wouldn't be too mad as long as Lilith went back later to explain.

They get in the car and speed off before anyone can chase after them.

"Jesus, Lil." Steve says, seemingly exasperated. "School is guna be Hell now."

"Well-" She starts, but her thoughts are too jumbled to continue.

She doesn't have an excuse anyways. All she can think about at that moment is that her quiet life is about to get pretty Goddamn loud. There are going to be rumors and probably some bullying, and it was going to be her fault. She was the one who retaliated, the one who

covered the three of them in whatever she could find on the table, the one who gave in to her stupid fucking feelings.

She also might have just made *Steve's* life worse...

She groans and drops her head onto the dashboard, hard.

She really needs to work on her anger management somehow. Maybe take a class or get some pills to even her out. She knows why her emotions are unstable. Who wouldn't be after everything she went through when she was little? She's sure the others are just as mood-swingy as she is, if they're even alive.

"I'm sorry..." she grumbles, head still resting against the dash.

He shrugs, "*I* can take it. But I know *you* like being invisible."

She nods.

"Are you guna be okay?"

"As long as you don't abandon me when it gets tough."

He smiles, holding back a small laugh because he feels like it would be rude to do that right now, then tells her he isn't going anywhere anytime soon. She smiles too, finally lifting her head to stare at him for a minute. Then she turns to the windshield and watches the houses pass by as they drive up the road to his place.

---

**The 'Billy and Crew' drama is necessary for some stuff later on in the fic, *I promise.***

**:D**

**I hope y'all enjoyed the chapter. I'll be back within the next week with another one.**

## 12. Chapter 12

Have some '*Lilith briefly meets the Party, sans Will*', along with some '*Steve becomes less sad*' and '*Lilith gets revenge for someone else's revenge*'. I thin I'm guna try to do these 2,000+ chapters more often, with cute mini chapters in between or something. Sound good? :)

---

Due to his parents not paying much attention to their two children Steve has no problems with Lilith staying in his room, even when they come back from their trip. Sure she has to sneak in if people are home, and they have to share a room and bathroom, and sometimes she has to hide if one of his parents suddenly decides to check in on him.

But other than that it's easy. Fun too. It feels like one long sleepover that neither of them really want to end.

Steve learns early on in the cohabitation that Lilith is a better ninja than he ever was. He remembers the few times he snuck up to Nancy's room, almost falling off the roof or making a too much noise in the process. Where he was clumsy, Lilith isn't. She's silent and stealthy and sometimes he doesn't even notice that she's come or gone.

The first time she sneaks out his window he nearly has a heart attack.

She carefully hoists herself out of his window, clinging to the windowsill as she lowers herself. When she's close enough to the ground to not break her legs she drops. Time stands still for what feels like forever when it's actually just a few seconds, and then he's rushing to the window to make sure she's okay.

She grins up at him, then runs off to his car.

Isn't that the best way to start their first day back at school?

Thankfully his parents are too preoccupied with their own morning ritual to stop him and wish him a good day, so he can run straight

out the front door and take off.

"Oh shit." He whispers to himself when they're already half way there.

"What's wrong?"

"I promised I'd drop the Nerd Brigade off at school today."

He stops the car, does a rough U-turn, and speeds off.

First on the pick-up list is his buddy Dustin. Lilith waits in the car, watching as Steve apologizes for being a bit late, and the woman she assumes is Dustin's mother smiles. She doesn't seem to mind.

Lilith watches the curly haired boy rush towards the car, then stop about a foot away from it when he sees her. She smiles at him, he smiles back, and after a few more seconds -and maybe a shove from Steve- he gets in the backseat.

"Hi." Dustin says awkwardly.

"Hey." she says with a nod.

He looks her over like a dad checking out his daughter's new boyfriend for the first time, and he doesn't look very impressed until he spots her *Ghostbusters* t-shirt.

"Yeah, you're okay."

She eyes Steve, who shrugs and tells her he has no idea what that was about.

He starts the car and they head over to Max's house. Apparently that's Billy Hargrove's little sister, and the dickwad was more than happy to let Steve act as her personal driver as long as *he* didn't have to. When they show up the redhead is already outside, sitting in the cold with her skateboard laying across her lap. She jumps up and runs to them, getting in the car so fast that Lilith doesn't get a chance to properly look at her.

"Who's she?"

*Adorable and blunt*, Lilith thinks.

"A friend." Steve replies.

"That's not a real answer."

He smirks, "Sure it is."

Max is about to argue again so Lilith turns in her seat and smiles at the younger girl.

"I'm Lilith."

"At least *she* gave me a real answer." Max huffs, then turns to Lilith.  
"I'm Max."

"I know. Steve talks about you g-"

She's interrupted by Steve's hand covering her mouth as he hurriedly tells everyone they're already really late. She notices the pink in his cheeks and snorts as she forcibly removes his hand from her face.

They drive down to the Wheeler's house where Mike and Lucas run out and jump in the car, looking wary and maybe even a little suspicious as they climb in. She turns in her seat once again and smiles at them. The two new additions stare at Lilith without a word.

"Hi." She gives them a quick wave.

They wait a few seconds before replying in unison with a "Hey."

They just won't stop staring, so she turns to Steve with a mock-offended expression to put on a show for them.

"Am I a unicorn?" She asks him in a tone that matches her face, "Do I look like a unicorn?"

"Wh-"

"Why am I being stared at like I just grew horns?"

Max answers for him, "We aren't used to seeing Steve with a girl."

"Especially a pretty one." Dustin adds.

Lilith grins at Dustin and then at Steve, "I like him."

Steve rolls his eyes and mutters something nobody in the car hears properly but still smiles as he pulls away from the house.

They make it to school with a few minutes to spare but everyone rushes out of the car like the bell just went. Lilith waits until Steve isn't looking to stop the kids so she can tell them something she's sure he wouldn't exactly approve of.

"I know that Troy kid gives you guys a lot of shit." she whispers, "So you tell *me* if he goes too far, 'cause I've been waiting for an excuse to knock the dipshit out." She quickly looks over her shoulder at Steve, then back at the kids. "*Don't* tell Steve I said that, but *do* tell Byers. Got it?"

They all nod and then run off.

What she told them wasn't a joke or a lie, and she thinks that maybe it got them all to trust her a little more than they seemed to before. The idea makes her kind of happy. The brats are kind of like Steve's own children, and she's sure if they don't like her very much that he would most likely choose them over her. *That*, and she thinks they're good kids, so she would rather they like her than not.

"You okay?"

She turns to Steve, "Hmm?"

"You were kinda spacing out over here. We gotta go."

"Oh, right." She smiles and take ahold of his wrist, "Let's go then!"

She starts to jog across the parking lot so suddenly that Steve ends up stumbling along behind her, but regains his footing and quickly takes the lead. Now he's dragging her along. They're both laughing, and other kids are staring at them, but they could both care less at the moment.

One nice surprise, Steve finds when they arrive at his locker, is that

Lilith's locker is only few down from his. That would definitely make finding each other to chat between classes easier.

Was that how she knew which locker to slip those sketches into?

He smiles at the thought.

The bell rings and they make their way to that dumb Art class they have together.

---

Lunch is...

Lunch is *weird*.

Lilith is so used to hiding herself in the Dark Room, drawing and nibbling at something small until lunch is over. But now? Now she's being dragged through the cafeteria by Steve as he searches for an empty table.

It's weird for Steve too. Lately, he's been eating outside of the cafeteria or not at all, because he was avoiding his friends at the time. But now he has a little more confidence to face them again, thanks to Lilith and her encouragement. And he has Lilith as back up in case he fucks it all up!

So, that's a plus.

He spots Jonathan and Nancy at a table near the back of the room and leads Lilith towards it. She's putting up a bit of a fight, but doesn't seem too unnerved by the idea of meeting them. Maybe it's because of the sketches of them she's done when they weren't aware?

Does she feel guilty about that like she did about his?

When Steve sits down across from them, Jonathan and Nancy look at him for a confused minute and then smile. They hadn't seen him in so long that they were surprised he even came to their table. Lilith stands there awkwardly until Steve pats the seat next to him. That when she finally plops down. She's chewing at her thumb nail nervously.

She's shy about the strangest things sometimes.

Steve introduces Nancy first, because that's the polite thing to do, but when he tries to introduce Jonathan she interrupts him.

"We've met a few times."

Jonathan nods with a small smile, "Dark Room buddies." he jokes.

She smiles back and finally stops chewing her nail.

Nancy holds out her hand to shake and Lilith takes it lightly. She's obviously *extremely* put off by skin-to-skin contact but she's trying to act normal, and 'normal' means shaking the hand that's offered to you.

They eat and chat, and Lilith thinks she and Nancy might get along pretty well after a few more 'get to know you' sessions. Maybe she could finally make a girl friend. The thought is nice, the image that comes with it a little too much like TV female friendships, but all-in-all it's uplifting. Lilith and Jonathan exchange more than just 'hello's and 'how are you's for once. That alone gives her a little bit of a confidence boost in the 'making friends' department.

If the rest of the year goes along like this then next year might not be so bad, even when Steve goes away for college.

---

Lilith never knew Carol was in her P.E. class until today, because before today Carol didn't know Lilith even existed.

But now she does and she wants revenge for the syrup incident.

That revenge comes in the form of an extremely rough hip-check during a Volleyball match. They're on the same team, the ball is coming right for Lilith, and she is more than ready for it. But Carol decides to swoop in and bump her out of the way and shoots a vindictive glare at her victim once the ball is back over the net. as she's in the middle of falling.

When Lilith lands she definitely feels something *pop*, she just doesn't know what exactly. Everything hurts, which makes it hard to

determine which part of her is worse off than the rest.

She landed on her side; hip first, shoulder second, ankle twisting as she lost her footing.

As Carol walks back to her designated spot on the court, Lilith stares at the girl's feet with narrowed eyes. It takes a few seconds of hard concentration before they suddenly come out from under her, and she falls face first onto the floor. Lilith wipes a trickle of blood from under her nose with a triumphant smirk as Carol's own nose gushes blood. They both end up in the nurses office, staying as far away from each other as possible.

She decides to keep this a secret from Steve. All of it, not just the 'tripping Carol from four feet away' thing. She doesn't need him getting upset or worrying about her as he liked to do.

---

The bruises that form properly the next day are huge and tender to the touch. She tries not to put weight on her right hip afterwards, or to lean on the same shoulder, and ends up with a barely noticeable limp for a little while. Hiding the bruises became a chore and a half, as Lilith wasn't the most modest person in the world. She hopes Steve takes her new-found love of privacy when changing as a good thing instead of something suspicious.

Thankfully, all of it heals rather quickly.

## 13. Chapter 13

**Something short because I have writer's block.**

**And Will is the only character with a cannon birthday, so I picked my own for a few of the characters. Mainly Nancy and Steve.**

---

For Lilith celebrating the day someone was born is a strange concept. She never liked the parties her *old family* threw for her, and her *new family* never celebrated anyone's birthday. As she got older she never really saw the point in congratulating someone for being expelled from another human's body, and for a long time she hated the fact that she was born in the first place. So it really didn't seem like a fun idea to celebrate it every year. But now she has friends, or people she considers friends, anyways. She's not sure if they feel the same about her yet, but she would like to think they do.

Jonathan was already sort of her friend with their short conversations in the Dark Room and mutual understanding of the other's desire to blend into the background, whereas Nancy was a little wary of Lilith at first. She would watch the quiet girl, looking for anything 'weird' or something similar; Lilith wasn't sure why but she knew Nancy was staring for a reason.

Then they talked, and talked again the next day, and the day after that too. That's when, finally, Nancy started to warm up to her. Now they sometimes step away from the boys for a little 'girl time'.

Lilith has never had 'girl time' before, she grew up around crabby old women and a bunch of rowdy boys.

So when Steve tells Nancy 'Happy Birthday' at school one morning in February, Lilith feels a little guilty that she didn't know; even moreso when she realizes she doesn't have a gift.

Nancy sits besides her on the hood of Steve's car as they wait for Jonathan to show up and Lilith takes the chance to glance at the other girl every once in while, trying to figure out what she could give her.

*Oh!*

She reaches into her bag for The Folder and flips through the sketches until she finds the right one, then nudges Nancy with her elbow. Nancy looks over and smiles, and Lilith hands her the sketch she did of Barb.

"Happy Birthday?"

It's a question rather than a statement, because she isn't sure how Nancy will react. Will she cry, or yell at her, or think it's creepy? Hopefully she'll be happy with it but there's a fifty-fifty chance she won't.

She ends up with a little bit of crying, but also a smile, and it's confusing for a second before it gets awkward. Awkward being trying not to push Nancy away when she suddenly gives her the biggest bear-hug she's ever received.

After that, 'girl time' happens a lot more often and Nancy insists that they spend a full day together without the boys. Preferably that weekend, at Nancy's; like maybe a sleepover. It becomes a mandatory thing when Lilith confesses that she's never had a sleepover before.

Nancy is really good at the 'puppy-dog eyes' look so Lilith gives in pretty easily.

## 14. Chapter 14

**Have some humor and fluff, I guess.**

---

Valentine's day.

It wasn't really something Lilith enjoyed. She had vague memories of cruel children and an empty card pouch whenever she heard the word. That stupid rule in elementary school that forced everyone to give every class member a little generic Valentine never worked. She was always left out when she lived with her family *before*, and most of the kids in her class in Hawkins had done the same thing.

And Zara would never fork over the cash for a cheap box of the dumb cards, so she always got in trouble. The teacher would scold her, she would tell them exactly what her 'mother' said, then get in more trouble for swearing but most of all; lying. She wasn't lying, though. Zara really would tell her those nasty things, laced with curse words and insults.

Even now, when she's in High School and the Valentine's Cards aren't mandatory but not received, she still hates it. Why people spend so much on Goddamn chocolates and flowers for a single day of the year, giving the overpriced gifts to someone they probably won't even be with in six months to a year, she would never understand.

Then again, she doesn't really understand most of that 'feelings' shit.

Sure, she understands 'anger' and 'fear' and 'sadness' and sometimes even 'happiness', but 'love' and anything like it is completely foreign to her. She understands 'loyalty', doing things for people you are about and standing up for them, never going behind their back. And she can get behind the 'putting others before yourself' thing, whatever that's called because she's sure 'selfless' isn't categorized as an emotion.

But 'love' towards anything besides a pet...

She just can't wrap her head around the idea.

*She can't even figure out the difference between 'like' and 'like-like'!*

So when the fateful day comes, and everyone in the entire town is being lovey-dovey -or moping because they don't have anyone either- she hides herself in her baggy hoodie even more than usual, trying to shield her eyes from the offensive hearts and roses and happy couples.

In all honesty, it makes her want to vomit.

Steve notices and asks if she's okay.

She ends up going off. Rants about what every Valentine's Day has been like for her and how she's actually clueless about what 'love' even is. She even tells him about the first she found her dumb mandatory card thing empty, and the boy who handed her a card filled with insults from the whole class and laughed at her, then that she pushed him -just not *how* she pushed him- and pouts childishly when she's done.

She hates sharing that kind of stuff. She's mad that she did, even though it was an accident, and she really doesn't like to talk about the things before she moved to Hawkins.

"I know I'm being stupid-"

"No, it's a perfectly valid reason to hate it."

She sighs, relieved that he isn't all Mr. Judge-y like she thought he would be. It was a weird thought to have at all, considering how little he's judged her for anything. Actually, she's pretty sure he hasn't judged her at all since they started... whatever this is.

---

At lunch she passes a table in the hall, where some cheerleaders are selling individual roses. The idea is for someone to buy one, write someone else's name on it and either send it anonymously or with their name signed. The roses get delivered during the last class of the day.

*Yep, that's Valentine's day for you*, she thinks. Just another way for the school to make money and the 'less desirable' students get to feel left

out.

She buys three, one for each of the only three people in the entire school she can stand for more than a minute. The people she's sketched to remind herself of the happy moment in life. The people who aren't like everyone else.

The stupid gifts are like an anonymous 'thank you' to them, because she feels like they deserve it in some form or another. You don't have to 'love' someone to send them something on Valentine's Day, right? Probably not.

She leaves the 'from' line empty on Nancy and Jonathan's, but on Steve's she writes 'L'; an inside joke between the two of them. She's sure it'll get a laugh out of him.

When that moment at the beginning of their last class comes, she slides down in her seat and stuffs her hands into her pockets. She wants to be as invisible as possible for this moment. Maybe, if she's luck enough, the floor will open up and swallow her whole.

The teacher calls out names. Some kids get a few of the prickly flowers all bundled up together, others get a single rose, and the last few don't get any.

Lilith ends up in the first category, staring at the tiny bouquet on her desk, willing it to disappear right this instant. It doesn't. She sighs.

She decides to see who sent them later and shoves them in her bag.

---

She sits on the hood of Steve's car, looking over one of the cards. It's just her name and a phone number she doesn't recognize. She squints at the numbers, as if *that* will help her solve the mystery.

It doesn't

Steve comes strolling over with the five usual kids right behind him.

"Hey th-" he pauses when he sees the flowers, "whoa."

Max, the one kid of the group who'd really accepted her probably

only because they're both women, runs over to check out her haul.

"Holy crap." She says.

"Yeah, it's weird. I didn't exist until, like, December."

*That dress.*

She will curse it for the rest of her life.

Max takes the phone number rose from Lilith to see what had her looking so confused before they came over, "This is my landline."

It would take an idiot to not understand what that means, and Lilith *is not an idiot*.

Dustin makes a joke about Max sending it, for which she smacks him, and Lilith sits there trying not to puke. Billy sent her his number, probably hoping to get 'something' out of someone -apparently *her*- whose face was 'okay enough to screw'. *Ugh*.

She rips the card off the stem, then tears into tiny pieces and hands the flower to Mike.

"Give it to your girlfriend." she smiles at him and he turns an adorable shade of red before he takes it, mumbling 'thanks' without making eye contact.

She checks the next one. It's from someone she doesn't know and he only wrote down her last name, so she tears that card off too and hands it to the curly-haired comedian in front of her.

The third-slash-last rose she has is sent to her full name, signed by... 'S'.

She raises an accusatory eyebrow at Steve. He mirrors her but with an added smirk, pulling his own rose from behind his back. The one she sent him. Evidently, they had the same idea. They stare at each other for another second before bursting into a fit of laughter that leaves them crying and winded.

They kids watch them like they're a pair of crazy monkeys at the zoo.

---

See?

Fluffy and adorable, just like a kitten.

A kitten I've decided to name *Stelith*.

It sounds dumb, but it's the lesser of two evils, so if you have a better ship name comment it!

Bye-bye now~

## 15. Chapter 15

**Awe shiiiiiiiiit!**

**Here comes Vicious! Lilith again, peeps. Prepare yourselves for the wrath of my wittle baby.**

---

She's in the middle of getting her Gym uniform from her locker when someone slams their hand against the locker next to hers. She ignores them, closing the door and turning the opposite way. But when she goes to walk away they quickly block her path.

She stares at the floor as she takes deep, calming breaths.

"You never called. I'm hurt."

*Oh God...*

"Of course I didn't. You think being a dick will make me like you?" She looks up at Billy with a hard glare.

He's smiling, and probably doesn't care that she absolutely hates him. He's on a mission and she's the target, apparently. She assumes this is exactly how he is with every girl he goes after; smug, over-confident, won't take 'no' for an answer.

"What has Max been telling you exactly?" He asks, smiling widening.

She makes a disgusted noise, "Nothing I haven't seen for myself already. Now move."

"Are you ignoring me because of Harrington?" He asks, "You and him, huh?"

He laughs and she bristles. They aren't dating, but the way he laughed at the idea is enough to make her blood boil. What's wrong with them dating? Is it because he used to be popular, or because she didn't really exist until two months ago?

"I'm ignoring you 'cause if I don't I'll end up breaking your nose."

*Or your neck*, she adds mentally.

"Sure you will, Gingersnap."

*Oh, Hell no!*

"I'll show you 'Gingersnap'!" she shouts, lunging at him with her fist raised.

Before she can land the hit an arm snakes around her waist and pulls her away with a spin. They don't let go, even when she struggles with everything she has. She's tiny. She knows that. And it makes her a lot weaker than she cares to admit.

"Lil, calm down!" Steve whispers harshly against her ear.

She stops flailing and after a few seconds of silence, when Steve's grip on her obviously slacks off a bit, she peels his arm away from her waist and lurches forward. She stumbles forward at first and then turns. She pushes past Steve, completely ignoring him when he tries to reason with her, stomping toward the blonde douche that's still smirking at her.

She reels back, putting as much 'force' behind her fist as she can without the consequence that usually follows, and decks him. Her right fist connecting with his left cheek *hard*. He grunts, turning a little to the side from the impact, and falls. Her knuckles throb and her breath comes out in strained puffs. Her anger is suffocating.

She doesn't even notice the small crowd that has gathered around the three of them.

"I. Don't. Like. You!" she emphasizes each word, glaring down at him. "How any girl could like you is a *fuckin' miracle!*" *Or a curse.* "Just-Ugh!" She throws her hands up in frustration and then runs them through her hair as she takes a really long, deep breath.

She's about to lay into him again when Steve grabs her by the wrist and pulls her away. They're running through the door just as a teacher is reaching the crowd of kids, wanting to see what's so interesting. They can faintly hear the teacher yelling at everyone to get to class before the door slams shut with a loud *thunk*.

Once they find a spot they both know will keep them hidden from any prying eyes, Steve asks her why she did it.

"He deserved it." she mutters, arms crossed and eyes downcast.

"I agree, but you can't do that *here*!"

"He needed to be taken down a peg and I'm the only one who's got the balls to do it!" She shouts.

"And I'm proud of you! Like, *holy shit*, you just knocked down the guy who nearly killed me!" He shouts back, then his voice and face soften as he continues, grabbing her shoulders to force her to face him. "But you can't do that at school. You could get in a lot of trouble, maybe even suspended."

She shrugs.

"No, Lil, it's not whatever. This place sucks and it'll suck even more *for me* if you aren't around."

Warmth spreads through her chest when he says it, getting warmer when she looks at his face and sees just how honest he's being. The look in his eyes giving it away. She gives him a half smile and nods. She won't do it again.

"They'll never believe I did it. Look at me!"

She gestures to all of her five and a half foot tall, one-hundred-twenty pound self and Steve laughs. He doesn't even believe it and he saw it first hand. Plus, there's no way Billy would admit to getting his face busted by a single punch from someone so small, especially a *girl* that small.

He pulls her into a side hug, "You're just full of surprises, huh?"

She grins, "Totally."

---

***Ugh.***

**Billy, am I right?**

## 16. Chapter 16

**Merry Christmas/Whatever-Holiday-You-Personally-Celebrate!  
And if you don't celebrate anything: Happy (early) New Year!  
This fic has already gotten into February, so I decided to do this  
for y'all as a Christmas present.**

**I hope you like it!**

---

It's mid February when Steve realizes he never gave Lilith the Christmas present he bought her, back when he still didn't know her name her face. It's wrapped in shiny red paper and sitting under his bed, a big green bow stuck to one of the corners. He only remembers because as he's cleaning his room he happens to reach under the bed for something, grazing the bow with his fingertips. Now, it's just a matter of giving her the gift without looking like an idiot.

Or, more accurately, like an even bigger idiot than usual.

He doesn't really have a chance to come up with a game plan before Lilith busts into his room.

The door swings open and she steps in with a smile on her face, but at the sight of Steve whipping around with his hands behind his back that smile falls. She thinks he's hiding something, something *really bad*, so she's worried and also a little mad. He tries to say something but it all ends up as stammered half-words and stuttering sentences that make no sense to either of them.

That's what being nervous does; turns you into a puddle of worry and confusing words.

So, instead of words Steve quickly closes the distance between them before thrusting the gift out towards her unceremoniously. Lilith stares at him, then looks down at the square, red-wrapped present. Her smile comes back to life, just sweeter and cuter this time. She takes it as he starts to explain why it's so late, but she shushes him. Tells him it's 'sweet' in the same tone he used when he told her how he felt about her drawings on New Years.

Lilith sits on the bed to open her gift, slowly peeling off the tape holding the edges of the paper down, knowing that the suspense of waiting to see her reaction is killing him even more than the nervousness he felt before handing it over.

Finally, he becomes so impatient that he *begs* her to just rip the paper to shreds.

"Y'know, like you just did to my self-esteem and sanity with all of-" he gestures to the neatly half-opened wrapping around her present, "-that."

She giggles, then tears into the paper to find a beat up old shoe box, the big kind they put big boots in. She looks up at him with a raised eyebrow and a smirk, and he assures her it's not the stereotypical 'every girls loves pretty shoes' present she seems to be accusing him of buying.

The lid comes off and her face lights up instantly.

Inside is a new sketchbook with a black hard plastic cover, a box of professional artist's pencils with all the different 'hardness's and junk, a few of those fancy charcoal pencils, a proper sketching eraser, and a set of black outlining pens with a tip range of Extremely Thin to Super Thick.

She excitedly squeals and Steve's nervousness dissolves instantly, the hug he gets as thanks close to back-breaking.

He makes her promise to draw him a few things -including a new portrait of himself and maybe a few of the 'shitheads'- with her new supplies and she happily nods in agreement, at a loss for words and simply to happy to try to think of any at the moment.

The first sketch she draws in it is something she forces Steve to pose for.

She let's him choose how, of course, but he has to sit still for an hour or so while she tests out every pencil and pen; recreating his slightly-above-average face on paper with sharp lines and perfect smudges.

---

**I might not be back until after New Years, so here's my holiday update.**

**I love you awesome Nerds.**

**Have a good whatever-tickles-your-fancy!**

**: )**

## 17. Chapter 17

Again, there's only a cannon birthday for Will, so I gave Steve my wife's birthday; March 28th. It was the first date that came to mind when I wrote down the idea for this chapter.

Also, I'm apologizing right now for how short this will be, but there's a part 2 coming, don't you worry!

Oh, and if you could give me some suggestions for Steve's birthday gifts I would greatly appreciate it.

By the way...

*Happy New Year, my friends!*

---

Steve's Birthday.

Lilith never thought she would be in his life when the day came around, but here she is!

Hiding whatever she gets him will be easy considering he's very respectful of her belongings and never goes through her things. It's just the *finding the present* part that's driving her nuts.

And at least the party is already planned out.

Will's birthday is six days before Steve's, so the other kids planned a joint party for a day between the two dates. They even came to Lilith for help, which made her tear up a little. They consider her one of the few older kids they can go to and that makes her love the 'little shits' -Steve *insists* she call them that- even more.

They ask her to distract Steve the same way Jonathan is distracting Will, because the whole thing is a surprise party. She's sure Steve has no idea -he can be kind of dense sometimes- but warns them that their friend might be wise to their plan. The word is part of his D&D character's name, after all, and he shows that the imaginary wizard earned his title on numerous occasions.

They assure her that both boys are clueless, and she agrees to be Steve's distractor.

But before any of that can happen Nancy makes sure to get some alone time with Lilith. She wants to talk about the party, and about what Lilith might wear, and then Lilith gets a sinking feeling. Nancy, one of the prettiest girls Lilith knows, is grinning as she tries to discuss clothes and make-up.

*Uh oh...* Lilith thinks.

There's a struggle, some very loud curse words accompanied by a couple of loud *thumps* that attract the attention of the kids in the basement, and finally someone taps out.

It's Lilith, by the way.

Nancy tackled her to the ground and pinned her arm behind her back painfully until she gave up.

"How are you so good at that?!" Lilith hisses as she rubs her sore shoulder.

She shrugs, "Mike is my little brother."

Lilith has to agree that *that* would help her fighting skills a lot.

"Still not as good as you and your punches, though. Billy's face was just... *wow*."

"Thanks!" She chrips sarcastically, "He deserved every week of that broken nose."

In truth, that punch was mostly backed by her powers. And afterwards her hand was throbbing so badly that she contemplated going to the hospital. But she didn't, and a day later the throbbing turned into a dull ache. The bruises on her knuckles were pretty gnarly, and she kind of liked the way they looked.

"Why do I have to get all dolled up?" She asks, disgust evident on her face and in her voice.

Dressing up was one thing Lilith hated, and hasn't done it since that one day in December. That day she had a momentary lapse in sanity and put on her makeshift funeral attire before school. She hates that

she did that. It brought unnecessary attention to her, and now there are people who notice her.

*Stupid, stupid, stupid!*

"Because it's a party?" She shoots back, more as a question than an answer; like she's hoping Lilith will answer back positively.

"I've gone to parties in overalls and baggy hoodies before. It's not a big deal."

"When?"

"Last year, at that Halloween party. 'Come get sheet-faced', remember that?"

"Not really..."

*Shit...*

The look on Nancy's face tells Lilith that she struck a nerve. She doesn't know if she should apologize or ask Nancy about it so she could possibly comfort her, and instead of picking one of the two roads she takes the trail between them.

Translation: she concedes, telling Nancy 'fine, do whatever you want'.

The girl more than happily obliges, grinning ear to ear as she goes through her closet to find something that will suit Lilith. They work together for the most part, but everything Lilith pulls out gets shot down by Makeover Master Nancy. She's sent to the bed to sit and wait.

The outfit Nancy settles on is preppy and not really Lilith's style, but it's dark green -which is so much better than pink or something- and there's no way out now that she's this far in. She takes the collared sweater/denim skirt combo and slowly puts it on, telling herself *it's just for tonight, just for the party, just to help keep Steve distracted*. Then they move on to the face painting station -Nancy's make-up covered vanity- where Nancy brushes her face with light colours, but is content to let her do her own eyeliner. She even allows Lilith to layer it on a little thicker than most girls in her new outfit would.

The compromise seems to work for them.

---

**I hope you're excited for the next part 'cause I sure am!**  
**: D**

## 18. Chapter 18

Yo, it's been a minute, hasn't it?

I've been down with a nasty cold for a while and because of my cough I now have *absolutely no voice*!

Thank God I don't need a voice to write fanfiction, am I right?

Anyway...

There are some detail in here, like mini things that might make you go 'Whaaaaat? When did *that* happen?!', that will be explained in a long-ass chapter I've titled 'Discoveries'.

Just a mix-matched chapter of moments from... let's say between New Years Day and, like, March or April. So, it'll be a little out of whack because there will be some things from before this chapter *and* after it.

One thing I plan on smooshing in here from 'Discoveries' is a kinda weird (and pretty hilarious, in my opinion) quirk of Lilith's that comes from being around her adoptive family for so long. They're mostly 'no boundaries' and stuff like that.

*Enjoy!*

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"This is such a bad idea." Lilith mutters as she pulls at the sweater Nancy's loaning her.

It's a dark green thing made of soft wool, with white collar to make it look like there's a blouse underneath. In reality, it's just a tank top. There was no way Lilith was going to put on one of those constricting dress shirts she hates so much. It was another compromise between girls, along with the knee socks/denim skirt pairing. Lilith wanted to wear pants and Nancy disagreed, so the two of them agreed on Lilith covering her legs somehow. The socks were a lucky find, to be honest. If Nancy hadn't found them in one of her drawers then Lilith's legs would have turned into figurative blocks of ice tonight.

Nancy hums and silently tells Lilith to do the typical after-makeover-spin girls are supposed to do by twirling her finger once. Lilith sighs but does as she's been told, and Nancy claps excitedly.

"I always love this part of a makeover."

"I don't." Lilith deadpans, "I feel like a clown in all these bright colours and the extra make-up."

"You look good." Nancy assures her, placing her hand on Lilith's shoulder and smiling. "You always do, but this is a different good. This is a less 'punk' good and more..."

"'Preppy' good?" She offers sarcastically.

Nancy sighs.

"Sorry, sorry. And, hey, I'll admit this-" she gestures to herself, "-looks okay. I just think it'd look better on *you*."

"Then I'll wear it some other time."

"Seriously, Nancy." Lilith's voice unintentionally pitches upwards a bit, showing just how distressed she's felt for the last hour or so. "This is a bad idea. He's gonna think something's up, or think I'm messing with him or-" she stops to run her fingers through her hair as she inhales sharply, "Oh my God! *What if he thinks I like him?!*"

Nancy smirks, "You don't?"

"What? *No!*"

"Mhmm, sure."

"No, really, I don't. I don't *like* him, okay? I d- No, stop smiling at me like tha- You are such a- *Ugh!* Goddamnit, Wheeler!"

Finally, Nancy bursts into a fit of uncontrollable laughter. The look on Lilith's face mixed with her rambling and how hard she was trying to convince Nancy that she didn't *like-like* Steve was too funny all together. Not to mention how red she was progressively turning.

It's the same way Jonathan gets when she kisses him unexpectedly, or grabs his hand without a warning.

It's the same thing Mike does when anyone teases him about how he acts around El.

It's also what Steve did when she privately asked him if Lilith was his new girlfriend about a month ago.

*Oh, that one had been hilarious.*

Nancy's laughter slowly tapers off until she's lightly panting as she wipes tears from under her eyes.

"You done?" Lilith asks with her arms crossed, face still slightly pink.

"Yeah, I- I'm good. Sorry. You're just too cute sometimes."

"I'm not-"

"You are. Now shush, let's go."

"Wait, 'let's'?"

"Yeah, it's Double Date! Didn't I tell you?"

"I hate you!" Lilith shouts.

The kids come up from the basement just in time for the show.

Nancy is trying to drag Lilith across the living room to the front door, but Lilith is using everything she has to resist her. She's about sixty percent sure Nancy might pull her arms out of their sockets at this point, though that seems less painful than being tricked into a double date that might *completely ruin her friendship with Steve!* She even puts a little of her powers behind her own tugging; even though she knows it doesn't make much of a difference.

In fact, it weakens her just enough for Nancy to win, but that comes with a draw back. Nancy was pulling so hard that when Lilith's resistance weakened, they both went flying in Nancy direction. Lilith ends up sprawled on her stomach across Nancy's chest, both girls groaning from both exertion and the pain of the fall. The kids all recoil in sympathy; the fall looked more painful than it actually was.

Lilith is back on her feet first, earning her a couple cheers from Max and Dustin. She quickly wonders when they started watching and why they've decided cheering is a thing they need to do at this

moment as she wipes the blood from under her nose. Then she's off! Running for the front door as fast as she can, leaving Nancy to pull herself off the floor while she hurriedly slips her shoes on. Shoes she knows Nancy wouldn't approve of for her current outfit.

"Deal's off, guys!"

"*What!?*"

She's not sure which one of them shouted at her because she's too focused on shoving her arms into the sleeves of her leather jacket.

Another piece Miss Wheeler wouldn't agree with.

"Yep!" Lilith shouts, "I'm not doin' it! Fuckin' forget it!"

Lilith yanks open the front door and immediately walks into something solid.

She stops and thinks about who or what she's just face-planted into, then huffs as she slowly steps back. *It could be one of the parents*, she tells herself. *No, wait, that's not right*. With the group of older teens around, all the parents had agreed to spend an 'adults only' day out; including dinner tonight. Except Hopper. He's working late and then picking El up after the party.

So... hopefully it's Jonathan. Jonathan who can maybe control his tiny, scarily strong girlfriend. Or at least pick her up so Lilith can run away.

She looks up and *holy shit, yes, it's Jonathan*.

But Lilith should have known he would help Nancy rather than her.

"Jon, grab her!"

Jonathan looks confused for all of three seconds as Lilith turns to run back into the house, which is when he hooks his arms under hers to hold her in place. He apologizes awkwardly as she struggles against him, but she doesn't hear it. She's too busy being mad at Nancy's almost hypnotic control over her boyfriend's actions. He's like some kind of personal *robo-servant* sometimes!

She struggles a little harder. Jonathan tightens his hold as Nancy rushes over with a triumphant smile, her hands going to her hips when she stops, one of them jutting out to the side as her smile widens.

"I win."

The whole situation brings bad memories to the surface. Lilith stops struggling so she can concentrate on pushing the images back down into the abyss she created for them so many years ago.

"Fine, I'll do it." she grumbles, then raises an eyebrow and asks: "But did you tell Steve this is a 'date'?"

The look on Nancy's face says 'no, I didn't' and it makes Lilith chuckle. She knows Steve and being tricked into shit; he won't be as mad as Lilith but he'll still be pretty peeved.

"Oooh-HOH boy, this is gonna be good!" She teases, enjoying the way Nancy goes red and the moment when Jonathan finally removes his arms from under her own. She takes a few seconds to dramatically dust herself off, then turns around and punches his shoulder lightly. "I'll be getting you back for that, Byers."

"Got it." He says with a small smile, "We should go now. Steve seemed pretty determined to come over. Said he has nothing to do and he's really bored."

"Probably because Lilith isn't there to keep him occupied-" Nancy stops herself when she notices the glare Lilith is giving her, "Nevermind. Let's just go."

The three of them wave to the kids. Jonathan tells them that he'll bring El and Will over around the same time Lilith brings Steve back as he pushes the lightly bickering pair of girls out the door.

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They meet Steve at The Hawk, where he's parked his car in the alley and is leaning against the hood. When Lilith sees him she starts to panic, but keeps it internal. She doesn't know if Nancy will start teasing her again and she doesn't want to find out.

Holding it all in results in a white knuckle grip on the edge of the backseat and lightly biting the inside of her cheek.

She steels herself and starts up a mental pep-talk.

*Get your shit together! You've been through worse than this! You've survived some tough shit. Compared to **that**, this is nothing. It's just Steve seeing you in a skirt! He saw you in a dress in December.*

*But he didn't **know me** back then...*

*No, shhhh! This. Is. Nothing. You've got a pair of kick-ass legs, so show 'em off!*

*Thanks, me.*

*No problem, me.*

Shaking her head to get rid of the stupidity she always feels after having a conversation with herself, Lilith climbs out of Jonathan's car just as Steve has made it halfway there. She freezes behind the open door when she sees him, but takes a long, deep breath and shuts it.

The look of utter shock on his face scares the crap out of her and she almost opens the door and jumps back into the car, but Nancy grabs her arm before she can even try.

"C'mon."

Lilith rolls her eyes, "I hate you so much right now."

"You'll be fine."

Steve speaks up while the girls are still making their way over.

"Thought it was guy's night tonight, Byers." He jokes as he claps Jonathan on the back.

Nancy scoffs, "You're both still too awkward around each other to hang out alone."

Lilith nods and crosses her arms, "You need us as a buffer."

"No, we don't."

"Yeah, you do." Lilith states.

She leaves Nancy's side and strides over to the two boys, who watch her warily from where they stand. They're about three feet apart from each other, curled in on themselves, refusing to look at each other.

Until Lilith give Jonathan a harder punch to the arm than usual.

A lot harder. Like, hard enough to make him grunt and rub at the spot that was hit. Steve looks between the two loners-types, seemingly shocked by the sudden bout of violence, and Nancy snorts from behind her.

Lilith points an angry finger at him like a mother scolding her child, "That's for helping Nancy detain me. Watch yourself from now on."

Jonathan rolls his eyes, still rubbing his arm.

"Have you seen Billy's face after she does her thing? She's not joking." Steve adds, trying to hide his smile.

Another eye-roll, "She wouldn't."

"Only 'cause we're friends. Anymore of that shit from earlier and we won't be."

"Yes ma'am." He replies with a military salute, voice is dripping with sarcasm.

They smirk at each other before Nancy pulls Jonathan back by his arm so they can walk alone, leaving Steve and Lilith up front. Lilith looks back quickly to see just how close they are and, uncomfortable with the easy eavesdropping distance, forces Steve to run ahead with her. Now at a safe distance she feels better about conversing.

Steve goes first.

"Nice skirt." He tries, but it comes out awkward and more like a question than a compliment.

"It's uncomfortable." She adjusts the hem as if to make a point, "Nancy had to wrestle it on me."

"That would have been interesting to watch."

She snorts, "You're such an idiot."

There's a moment of silence before either of them speak again, and it's when they're in line for a ticket. The Wheeler/Byers couple are right behind them now, so Lilith leans in and whispers as quietly as possible.

"It's weird, isn't it?"

He gawks at her, floundering for a moment as he tries to come up with something, but just ends up stuttering instead.

"I freakin' knew it..." She mutters and drops her head into her hands, "I told Nancy this was stupid but *nooooo*. 'It's a good distraction', she said. 'It looks good', she said. Fuckin' bullshit, is what it is."

"Lil, stop." He grabs her wrists so he can pull her hands away from her face, and smiles when she finally looks up at him. "It was weird at first, but you look nice. I'll get used to it."

She snorts, both embarrassed and disbelieving. The next words out of her mouth are said without a second thought. A second thought -or even a first in this case- would have been a great idea, but sadly they didn't happen.

"You've literally seen me naked. How is me in a skirt weird after that?"

She doesn't feel stupid for saying it until they both notice Nancy and Jonathan staring at them. They look shocked, and there's a long moment of silent staring before Steve launches into a stammered explanation. He tries to defend himself, at first, but then just tries to tell them about how Lilith likes her 'freedom', and since she's staying at his place right now that means he's subject to daily heart-attacks from a half-naked redhead walking around his room.

Lilith rolls her eyes.

*Hey, yeah. If you're not embarrassed by **that**, why are you so uppity about a stupid skirt?* She asks herself.

It's a good point that helps her relax a little. Some of her confidence even comes back. She tangles one of her arms around one of Steve's as she announces that they don't feel like a movie anymore.

"Double Date over, Wheeler. We're out. See ya!"

They're out of line and in Steve's car before Nancy can protest, while Jonathan tries to hold in his laughter beside her.

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"That was..." Steve starts.

"Awkward?" Lilith offers.

"Yeah, and I blame you."

"You do that, then. I'll take full responsibility."

"Where are we even going?" He asks.

She'd jumped into the driver's seat by accident during their escape, and now she was taking his car for a spin through downtown Hawkins without a clue as to where she was going to keep Steve until the party.

"Shit, I don't know... Bowling? The park? School?"

"This is a poorly thought out kidnapping, Miss Romancek." He tells her in an adult tone.

She rolls her eyes, a small smirk somehow making its way onto her features.

They pass Melvald's for probably the third time when Lilith gets an idea. She roughly pulls up in front of the store, hops out, and rushes to the door but walks in calmly. Steve follows as quickly as he can, realizing Lilith never actually uses her seat-belt which gives her a head start in any race that begins in the car. He scans the store for Lilith, finding her down one of the center isles, and stops to greet

Joyce at the til.

"She's with you?" Joyce asks with smile.

"Yep."

"Do you know what she's looking for?"

"Not a frickin' clue."

Lilith comes up to the til at that moment, a deck of cards, a package of Oreos, and a couple cans of Coke in her hands.

"Uh-" Steve starts.

"I hope you aren't planning on gambling tonight. It's illegal if you're underage, you know." Joyce jokes as she scans the items.

"Nope, just guna make Steve here 'pick a card, any card!'" Lilith replies dramatically, giving Joyce the stupid 'jazz hands' routine, then leans against the counter and smiles. "Nice to meet you, by the way. I'm Lilith."

"Oh." Joyce draws out the sound, "Steve's new 'girlfriend'? Will's told me about you a few times."

"Best buds." Lilith crosses her fingers, "Like that. We trade artist's secrets and everything."

"So he's said." Joyce smiles kindly as she hands over the full plastic bag, "Have fun you two."

"Thanks!" The two of them call over their shoulders as they walk out.

Once in the car, Lilith looks at Steve. She's all seriousness and staring and it's starting to freak him out until-

"Why does everyone think I'm your girlfriend?"

She smirks a little and he relaxes. She's not pissed, she's just screwing with him. He should be angry, or even just a tiny bit peeved, but he's not. He's just happy he didn't accidentally tick her off somehow.

"The shitheads do it to tease me, same way they do with Mike and Jane or Lucas and Max. Will probably called you that by accident in front of his mom. He's not the kind of kid who teases people much, not even his friends."

"Hmmm. Guess I'll be having a 'talk' with your kids later."

"As you wish."

Even though they make a joke of it every time it comes up, both of them end up thinking it over afterwards.

*What would dating be like between the two of them?*

Would it end badly sooner rather than later, or would it work out and stay strong in the long run?

Lilith is sure Steve would run the second she slips up and shows him she has, er, *abilities*. Maybe one day, when they're fighting over something stupid, it'll get more and more heated until she throws something at him *with her frickin' mind*. Steve will run away without looking back and *that's it*; that's the end. They would never speak to each other again. Not that she wouldn't try, because she really would, but she's certain he would ignore any calls or visits from her.

And she wouldn't blame him for it.

And if it's not a case of accidental telekinesis -or telepathy, since she's better at that- then it will definitely be something more mundane, yet worse somehow. It could be all of her emotional baggage or her mood swings or maybe -for some stupid reason- she'll end up a bitter alcoholic like her adoptive mother. That would definitely drive him away. She's also not completely sure if she even *likes* him that way. It's still a little hard for her to decipher that emotion from the rest of her nicer feelings towards the people she's deemed her 'friends' in the last few months.

Steve, on the other hand, has convinced himself that he will somehow make Lilith hate him. He doesn't know how or when or why, but that's what he's sure of. He did it with Nancy, and yes he knows how/when/why their whole relationship became 'bullshit'. He

knows, and he'll admit that it was in a big way *his fault*. So, he's convinced that he's going to be a shitty boyfriend to any girl willing to date him now.

*Even Lilith.*

He's thought it over a few times and every scenario ends in a yelling match, or just Lilith shouting at him. He apologizes profusely, but she just won't stop crying and yelling. There's no saving it, ever, in *any* of his fantasy lives with her.

They both push those thoughts down and turn to smile at each other as Lilith starts the car and Steve buckles in.

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"You ready?"

"I guess?"

"Fear not! My card tricks are far less dangerous than the other acts I have hidden up my sleeve."

She bows with one arm folded against her stomach and the other stretched as far as it can go to the side.

"You're such a dork."

She straighten out again and mock-glares at him, "And *you're* ruining it, asshole."

He throws his hands up defensively, watching as she drops down next to him on the bench, turns to face him, then brings her legs up and crosses them.

He wont remind her that she's wearing a short skirt, and he definitely wont tell her that he caught a glimpse of her underwear when she first brought a leg up, because Steve likes living. He's not sure if Lilith would kill him, or if the heart attack from how awkward that conversation would be would do it, but he's pretty certain something would.

Lilith's tricks mostly consist of 'is this your card?' and 'Where'd it g-

OH, it was behind you ear!' and turning one card into a different card that is somehow the card Steve chose. And despite how basic the tricks are Lilith performs with such professional enthusiasm that he can't help but smile and play along. She looks so happy while she does her tricks. Almost as happy as when she draws.

Her smile is a lot wider than usual, but not as nice. Her usual smile, the smile she has when drawing or when they just talk, is calm and barely noticeable and contagious. It's his favourite, to be honest. He'll never openly admit it, but it's true.

Lilith stops, looks at her watch, and frowns.

"What's wrong?" He asks.

"We gotta go." She tells him as she starts to get up.

"Where?"

"It's a secret. And when we get in the car, I'm gonna need you to blindfold yourself."

He laughs, "You planning on murdering me?"

"Pffft, no."

"Kidnapping, then?"

"Why would I kidnap you when I know you would willingly follow me anywhere?"

She smirks and winks and Steve can feel heat rise from his neck to his ears. Thank God it's getting dark out. Hopefully it hides the redness he knows is spreading across his cheeks.

Since they don't have anything to use as a blindfold Steve lays down across the backseat and closes his eyes, promising to only look at the roof if he opens them. He tries one more time to ask where they're going and Lilith just laughs. There's no way he's getting an answer until they get there.

After a few minutes of only radio, Lilith turns down the music and

speaks.

"You know, Nancy called this whole thing a Double Date."

Steve hums, "I heard you yell that earlier. I just thought it was a joke."

"Nah, she really did decide to force us into a date. Is she always like that?"

"I think she's just happy to have a girl friend her own age again. And I'm sure Barb wasn't an easy person to trick into anything."

"She probably saw through Nancy's shit all the time."

They both laugh sadly. The thought of Bard brings up feelings and memories that are very different, but equally upsetting for each of them. Though, they mostly just feel bad for Nancy.

"Would it be so bad if it really *was* a date?"

He regrets asking it the second he's half-way done, but powers through to the end, wincing when she doesn't answer within thirty seconds. And when she *does* answer, she starts with a drawn out 'uh' that makes his blood run cold.

"That... depends." She replies slowly, "Would it be *weird*?"

"I don't think so."

"Would it change things? Between us?"

"Meaning?"

"If it didn't work out, would we... not be friends anymore?"

"I, uh..."

He has to stop and think his answer through. Should he tell her what he really thinks, which is '*I wouldn't be able to do that because I'd be too embarrassed*', or should he lie and say '*it'd be fine, we'd be fine, everything would be fine*'?

"I don't know."

"Oh..."

"Wow, I fucked that up, huh?" He tries, but the joke doesn't really do anything.

Lilith is silent in the driver's seat. Her reflection in the rearview mirror shows him just how pensive and serious she is at that moment. He doesn't like the tight, thin line her lips are set in, or the way her dark rimmed eyes are narrowed at the road, or the white knuckle grip she has on the steeringwheel.

That's the Lilith he sees when Billy is around.

And Steve made her look like that.

Yeah, he fucked up big time.

Steve rubs the heels of his hands against his eyes and holds back a frustrated groan.

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**I can't give them a break, can I?**

**Part 3 soon, with the double birthday party and everything! I'm super excited and kinda torn between 'I should start their *thing* next chapter!' and 'No, I should wait for a better, cuter, sweeter moment and make it special'...**

**Thoughts?**

## 19. Chapter 19

**So... I made my decision.**

**Buckle up, kiddos!**

***Shit is about to go down.***

---

Steve sits up and climbs out of the back seat to find Jonathan ushering El and Will to the Wheeler's front door. That means Lilith drove them back to Nancy's which is *fine*. He just wants to know why.

She tells him to follow her, and they meet the other three guests at the door. Lilith and Jonathan share a look before he knocks. There's bunch of shouting on the other side of the door, shouting that confuses only Steve and Will, who give each other equally questioning looks, then turn back to the door just as Mike throws it open.

He smiles and -of course- greets his girlfriend before anyone else, then steps aside to let everyone in.

They're met by a loud chorus of 'surprise' from everyone in the Demogorgon-slaying family. Steve grins. His birthday is in a few days while Will's passed a couple days ago, and Steve could put two and two together pretty easily.

A joint party, between his and Will's birthdays, just so *everyone* could show up and celebrate.

This is his life now, apparently, and it's a pretty awesome one.

Will looks just as excited as Steve feels, and he can't help but reach down to ruffle the little shit's bowl-cut.

The party starts then, with music being turned up fairly loud and food coming out of the kitchen to be placed on the coffee table. Dustin comes over for a massive bear hug and then hands over a messily wrapped gift. Steve takes it and thanks him, and then suddenly it's not in his hand anymore. He looks over his shoulder to find Lilith placing the small package in her bag.

He smiles and thanks her too because, honestly, he had no idea where he was going to store any other presents he received tonight until he had to leave. He actually wasn't even expecting to get *anything at all* from any of the kids or his friends, but that's what was happening.

Will even has a pile forming next to him on the couch. Presents from everyone in the room and a couple from people who weren't there, like his mom.

The whole scene makes Steve feel more at home than he ever has anywhere before.

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Lilith catches sight of the only Party member she hasn't met yet - Steve called her Jane, right?- and decides she's going to walk over and talk to the girl.

She's standing in the kitchen, obviously very deep in thought over the messier snacks that were left on the dining table, probably giving too much thought into what she should pick. Her brows furrow slightly and she hums, making Lilith chuckle.

*Too cute*, she thinks.

"Hi." She says quietly, "I'm Lilith."

Jane turns and gives her a small smile, looking her up and down nervously.

*Shit, right, Steve said she's kinda skittish.*

"I, um, have something for you." Lilith says slowly as she reaches into her bag for the Special Folder she never leaves the house without. It takes all of two seconds for her to find the sketch from the Snow Ball, and she studies it for a second before handing it to the smaller girl. "I saw you and Mike at the dance and I drew this. You should have it."

Jane cautiously reaches out and gently takes the piece of paper from Lilith. Her eyes instantly widen when she see the almost photo-realistic sketch of her and Mike at the Snow Ball, foreheads touching as they dance, right after their quick kiss on the dance floor. She

looks up at Lilith with a wide smile, then throws her arms around the older girl's waist.

"Thank you!"

Lilith, again, hates shit like this -hugging, handshakes, touching general- but she will always endure it for these endearing little brats. Especially Max and Jane. They're too adorable to *not* make exceptions for. She gently pats Jane's mass of dark curls, muttering about how it was 'no problem' with a smile on her face.

And, of course, Jane's personal Prince Charming comes looking for her, only to find the two girls mid-embrace. He gives them a weird look and they both giggle. Jane unlatches herself from Lilith's midsection to run over and show Mike her gift. His face turns about ten different shades of embarrassed when he gets a look at it, then he looks up at Lilith with wide, scared eyes. Lilith smiles and winks at him.

"I see everything, little dude." She joking warns him, brushing a hand over his head lightly as she walks past the couple. "There might be more of those coming, if the older Byers brother doesn't manage to catch it with his camera."

Mike lets out a fairly undignified squeak before Lilith makes it out of the kitchen, and she laughs.

*Too freakin' easy*, she muses.

The living room is full of happy people, dancing and singing and generally having a good time, but Lilith is less enthused.

She doesn't really like parties, but the excess of noise is kind of nice. It helps keep her out of people's heads and stay in her own. The mind-reading aspect of her abilities can get out of hand once in a while and then Lilith will end up with everyone's voice in her head, bombarding her with their inner monologue. Sometimes she'll even see old memories, or stupid day dreams. It's really not as fun as it might sound.

At least the music helps keep her powers in check. That's where the

Walkman she brings everywhere usually comes in. But she feels like pulling it out at a party would be rude, so she didn't bother bringing it.

Even with her head clear and her friends all enjoying their night, Lilith can't seem to bring her emotional level up to any of theirs. She watches them dance and converse with each other, smiles back when Nancy smiles at her from her place in Jonathan's arms, chuckles when Dustin tries to do a stupid dance move and fails so badly he ends up on his back on the floor. But still, she's just... not in the mood.

It takes her a minute to figure out why, and when it finally clicks into place she feels so *utterly stupid* that she smacks her forehead and groans. The conversation, in the car, with Steve. 'I don't know', he said. He couldn't give her a definite answer and his '*I don't know*' sounded more like a '*no*' to her, which upset her...

*Oh for the love of-*

Yeah, no. She's going to squash those feelings right then and there. There is *no way* she wants to go down the First Crush road with Steve in mind. He's the only thing tying her to all these people. People she will never be able to easily give up now, people she will love like family for the rest of her life, people she *needs*. If she screws shit up with Steve, they all disappear!

That's not happening.

She decides to snuff out those feelings, to bottle them up and throw them away, to toss them into the same abyss she shoves all her worst memories into.

She doesn't feel any better after that mental conversation with herself. She knows how to fake it though, and so she does.

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Three hours into the party and the kids have all wandered into the basement to catch some sleep. That's when the older kids get to pull out the 'fun stuff' and start their own party.

Apparently, after that Halloween party and her night at Murray's last year, Nancy had started to really like drinking. Steve wouldn't call her a lush -yet, anyway- but she definitely had a weird relationship with alcohol now. He honestly can't blame her for it with all the shit she's gone through in the last two years, but he still doesn't like it much.

After his second Vodka and Coke he stops caring as much and starts laughing more. Jonathan too. And Nancy is the one making the jokes, which is weird because she has a pretty shitty sense of humor normally. He looks over at Lilith who is looking into her cup and slowly swirling it's contents, frowning slightly.

He puts his cup down and drops his head into her lap, startling her so badly she jumps and spills some of her drink.

"What the hell!" She hisses.

"You look sad." He states, mock-pouting at her.

"I'm fine."

"You're not."

She picks his head up and drops him onto a space of couch cushion next to her thigh, "Fuck off."

"Sorry, right, no touching." He grumbles.

He doesn't understand what he did wrong -or how to fix it since he doesn't know *what* to fix- but he knows he has to fix *something*. Then again, Lilith is being kind of stand-off-ish with all three of them right now, so maybe it wasn't *him*. Maybe it was just one of her sudden mood changes, or one of the kids pissed her off earlier.

"Seriously, what's up?"

"Just remembered I can't hold my liquor very well." She mumbles as she leans forward and places the cup on the table, next to his. "Makes me grumpy. Makes it harder to... concentrate. Things get weird."

"So don't drink."

"Have you ever been the sober one in a group of drunks?"

He thinks back to the Halloween party, the one where Nancy professed all of her thoughts on their 'bullshit' relationship. Everyone but him had been drunk that night. He nods and she hums in response before she starts talking again. He likes her voice, but not when she sounds as upset as she does right now.

"Yeah, I'd rather get weird than feel like that. Just- just don't touch me again, okay?"

He frowns, but agrees. "Got it."

She rests her cheek against her fist, "Thanks."

Another drink and suddenly Lilith isn't next to him anymore. He props himself up on his elbows to look at Nancy and Jonathan cuddling in Mr. Wheeler's recliner, giggling and drinking together, but sees no sign of Lilith. He asks them and they shrug.

After a few minutes of tipsy searching Steve find her on the front lawn.

She's wrapped in her leather jacket, perched on the front step, knees held against her chest. Her breath comes out in little clouds every time she sighs -which happens pretty often- and Steve watches her for a minute before he announces his presence by telling her she should come inside.

"Why?" She asks, her voice just as cold as the night air.

*Ouch.*

"It's cold and you're still in a mini skirt."

She shrugs but stands anyway, wobbling once she's on her feet. He doesn't think she drank more than he had, yet she was stumbling like she downed an entire bottle on her own. He offers her a helping hand and she refuses it, saying something about how she's 'not a little girl'.

They get inside and he closes the door, turning back to her just in time to see her trip over her own feet. Without thinking he reaches

out and wraps an arm around her waist, then takes hold of the banister next to the door with his other hand to steady himself. She doesn't even struggle. She just goes limp against him and it worries him a lot more than it should.

"I hate you." she says suddenly.

He almost drops her as he slowly registers exactly what she just said.

"Wha-"

"I didn't have *feelings*-" she spits the word out like it's the most disgusting thing she's ever tasted, "-before you came around. Why did I have to do something so stupid? Getting involved with people is always stupid for someone like me."

"Lil, what are you talking about?"

"I was better off alone." She whines.

"Nobody is better alone. You told me that."

"Well I'm a fuckin' idiot, then."

Basically sober now, Steve helps Lilith walk into the dining room. He places her in one of the chairs and then kneels down in front of her so she isn't able to get away too quickly if she decides to try. She stares at her knees while he stares at the hair that's covering her face. He looks down the find her hands are once again white-knuckle gripping whatever they can.

It's almost like she's trying to keep herself from punching something.

"Lil, seriously, what's up? You're acting weird."

"I *am* weird, idiot. I'm the weirdest of weird." She sniffles and continues, "I still don't get why you want me around."

"Cause you're great?"

She snorts.

"And you're nice."

She turns her head to the side, staring at the wall now.

"And you helped me out of a pretty bad place with all those pictures and notes."

"Yeah, that's me! Always doing stupid shit that turns out to be good for someone else, but bad for me."

Steve sighs. This conversation is going in circles now.

"Why do you hate me?" he asks.

"Because you're *feelings* and *kindness* and a bad habit."

That's a nice little skip-a-beat his heart just did.

"-and *I hate it*."

Well, nevermind then.

"Why, though?"

"I didn't have to feel things before. Not feeling shit was better."

*Man, drunk Lilith is super depressing*, he thinks.

"And our little chat in the car earlier put some stuff into perspective, so now I'm all... *bleh*." She lazily waves her arms above her head, stops, then looks at him only to look back down at her lap two seconds later. "This is stupid. *I'm stupid*."

---

On her end, Lilith is feeling way too many things at once.

Sure, being the only sober person when your friends are all drinking is no fun, but she knows perfectly well how booze screws with her. Lilith is a lightweight and an emotional drunk, so here comes the waterworks and self-deprecation laced with insecurities and maybe even some kind of drunken confession. She's all anger and sadness and self-hatred and adoration towards Steve and *sick to her fucking*

*stomach*. She hates crying in front people, even herself, and now she's nearly bawling in front of Steve of all people.

She just wants to leave and never come back!

She considers using her powers to scare Steve into hating her for a moment, or maybe to just get him out of her way so she can run. Then she remembers her lack of control when intoxicated. The physical stuff never works when she's like this, but the mental stuff does. Too bad the mental stuff doesn't freak out normal people the way it does with her. Instead, she just keeps crying and berating herself and explaining 'what's up' in a way that only she really understands. She watches Steve try to comprehend the meaning behind her words, but it's lost on him. Or, it *was* until she mentioned their 'little chat in the car'.

Now he seems to understand a bit more than before.

She stands up so suddenly that Steve falls on his ass.

She needs out, like, *right now*.

Lilith is fast, making it to the entrance of the dining room in record time. But Steve is faster and he beats her there, pulling her back in and using his body to block her path. She's stuck now, and neither of them attempt to talk or move or do *anything* really. Not until she looks up at him with tears in her eyes, watching as his frustrated expression softens into a small, sad smile.

She feels like crying even harder when he does that.

Then the feeling is gone just as quickly as it came because Steve is impulsive and Lilith is almost too compliant when it comes to what Steve feels like doing, so when he reaches for her she doesn't protest or complain or step away; she simply lets him do whatever he has planned.

She definitely wasn't expecting *this*.

Steve kisses her.

*He fucking kisses her!*

He kisses her and it's like everything around them disappears.

It's soft and slow, comforting on so many different levels, reassuring in ways neither of them could ever describe. He rests his hand below her ear, brushing his thumb along her cheek as their breath mingles. Her hand comes up, fingers ghosting across his collar bone and down to his chest where she can feel just how fast his heart is thumping under the palm of her hand.

His other hand moves from her hip to her lower back, pulling her closer until there's barely any room between them. She reaches up to wrap her arms around his neck, standing on her toes to get rid of that half an inch of extra space between them, pressing her chest hard against his.

When they part, eyes closed and lips tingling, he rests his forehead against hers and smiles.

*That was a really good idea*, he thinks with a happy sigh.

She hears him and agrees silently, knowing that in that moment she's smiling like a Goddamn moron.

---

Everyone sleeps in pairs that night.

In the basement Lucas and Max are shoulder to shoulder, sleeping upright on couch with a large blanket draped across their laps, hands clasped together underneath it.

On the floor across the room are Dustin and Will. Dustin having rolled over in his sleep a while back and snuggled into Will's side with his arm around the smaller boy's waist. Neither of them are ready for the startling awakening they'll have tomorrow.

And finally, near the door to the backyard, are Mike and El. They're sleeping in a sort of 'T' shape, with El fast asleep in the blanket fort that will probably never come down, and Mike just outside of it. His head laying next to her hip, fingers intertwined with hers, dopey smiles on both of their faces.

On the top floor Jonathan and Nancy take over her bed, spooning

with stupid grins on their faces, unaware of the matching hangover that awaits them.

On the living room couch are Steve and Lilith. Steve is acting as a second mattress -the first being the couch cushions- for Lilith. She's situated herself between his legs, unintentionally pushing one of them off the couch completely, and is laying back against his chest. His chin rests against the top of her head and both of his arms are wrapped around her waist.

---

**Yeah, so, *that* happened...**

**It was my first time writing a detailed kissing scene!**

***Can you believe that shit?!***

**:D**

## 20. Chapter 20

This is that giant mix-n-match of snippets between New Years and the last chapter.

I just wanted to give you all a look at Lilith through Steve's eyes. I might do another on like this, but about Steve through Lilith's eyes instead. That might be a bit more of challenge considering *I created Lilith* and *Steve is property of the Duffer Brothers*, so they know him better.

Oh well, challenges are always good for writers, right?

---

Steve's newest discovery of 1985: Lilith has a very loose understanding of the word 'modesty'.

Steve finds this out early on in their cohabitation when Lilith comes out of the bathroom in just a tank top and her underwear. She's too busy drying her hair with a towel to notice him, frozen in the hallway, trying to look at anything *but* her. She gets closer and it takes everything he has to make sure his voice doesn't crack when he reminds her that she's living with a guy now.

She looks at him, cheeks pink from the heat of the bathroom, and smirks. Then she drops the towel and cups each breast in a hand, squishing them against herself, moving one up and the other down over and over. Of course, Steve looked at her to gauge her reaction, and looks away immediately when she starts.

Now he feels like a skeeze.

"Can't handle *boobs*, Harrington?" She teases, her smirk widening into a grin.

Oh, he can most definitely 'handle boobs', but this is just weird. Aren't girls supposed to get embarrassed when a guy sees them like this? Meaning fully naked, or at least visible through thin fabric. Why doesn't the current situation embarrass her, but Steve finding out that she secretly drew portraits of him did?

The whole situation is kind of confusing.

"Sure I can, just-" he can't think of a reasonable excuse as he fixes his gaze on the ceiling, and simply goes with: "-why doesn't it bug *you*?"

"My whole family walked around naked whenever they felt like it." They both shudder at the mental image of naked grandparents walking around, but she seems a little less fazed than he does. "I got used to it, so it doesn't bother me anymore."

But...

*Oh, whatever.*

"A bra would be nice in the future. Y'know, in case Troy is around."

"Ah, the one person I don't want seeing-" she cups her hands under her breasts again, "-*these*."

Steve grimaces and Lilith laughs.

"You're an idiot."

He flinches.

It's only part of the usual sarcastic insult that he heard so often from Nancy, but it still tugs at the two percent of him that isn't quite over her yet.

Shaking off the weird feeling he can't really describe, he makes his way downstairs for something to eat and maybe a movie. Lilith will join soon, and they'll lapse into that comfortable silence they both enjoy so much.

---

Music.

Lilith has very diverse sense of musical tastes.

Blues, Country, Pop, Punk, Rock.

*Elvis, Johnny Cash, Poison, Joan Jet, Queen.*

Even some stuff that only their grandparents would listen to, like

*Betty Hutton and Jim Croce.*

She loves any song that her foot unconsciously taps along to, or that makes her want to dance. She sings along to most of them, too. She's not the greatest vocalist in the world; she messes up the words pretty often and sometimes sings out of tune. But he's not about to tell her any of that. He enjoys her off-key singing and mis-sung lyrics too much to tell her she needs more practice.

He also doesn't want to risk offending her, lest she decide to either kill him or never speak to him again.

There's one day where she seems to be in the best mood he's ever seen her in, sitting on the bed with one of her tapes playing a *Nick Lowe* song, bobbing her head to the beat with a huge smile on her face as she etches something onto one of the first pages of a new sketchbook.

When Steve walks in the song is just ending and an older, more upbeat song starts. Lilith looks up at him and grins -full-on freaking grins!- then throws her art supplies to the side and rushes over to him.

He'll never know what put her in a good enough mood to dance, or why she decided to make him dance with her, but the fast-paced swaying and twirling her with one hand he experienced was totally worth being clueless.

It's not like he needs to know absolutely everything about her, after all.

After that, the old song "Little Queenie" by *Chuck Berry* will be one of his all-time favourites til the day he dies; long after that inevitable day as well.

He asks Jonathan to put it in a mixtape for him a few days later, along with a couple other songs from that day. He also tells the Mixtape Master to add whatever else he feels like adding, because Steve is sure he'll like anything and everything on that tape if it makes Lilith dance like *that* again.

---

The next big look into the mysterious Lilith Romancek happens the day he introduces her to Nancy and Jonathan.

Lilith apparently bites her nails when she's nervous, which is pretty often, and she does it so much that she almost has no fingernails left. They're as short as they can possibly get, ragged in some places, and one of them dips down in the center; presumably from years of her teeth pushing on that exact spot.

Sometimes Lilith will be in the middle of chewing on a nail when Steve will hear her hiss, only to look over and find her bleeding.

She bites her nails so much that they *bleed*.

He doesn't realize how bad of a habit it really is until she rips deep into her thumb and blood pours down the side of her hand. He's worried about her with how much blood she's losing in that moment, even though it's actually not a lot and she keeps assuring him she's fine. She's more worried about the couch than herself.

*The Goddamn couch!*

When he's done patching her up he lectures her about bad habits and priorities -"You're more important than the freakin' couch!"- and tells her to do something else when she's anxious, because he really doesn't want her to literally chew her fingers off someday.

"Well, what do you suggest?" she asks, frowning slightly.

*Awe, she's pouting.* He sarcastically coos to himself.

He shrugs, "Something that doesn't involve self-cannibalism."

She giggles, and the way she does it makes his heart flutter.

"If I'm around just, like, grab my arm or my sleeve or something."

He starts thinking about how frequently she gets nervous and how often he sees her biting her nails, and his stomach does flips. If she goes along with his idea then she'll end up touching him /a lot/, and he's not sure if he's *upset* about that or *nervous* or *completely fucking ecstatic*.

It's confusing.

He doesn't know which feeling to focus on, so he goes with a mix of happy and nervous because she agrees with that smile she saves just for him.

The next time she feels nail-biting levels of nervousness they're in the hall at school, walking to their shared Art class. That's when she discreetly curls her fingers into a piece of his sleeve. He looks at her hand, then her face. Her eyes are wide, darting back and forth across the small space, and she presses into his side a little more every time someone passes by her.

That's also the day he finds out Lilith isn't a big fan of crowds.

---

The 'no touching' rule.

That's another one he doesn't ask her about.

She flinches, or cringes, or basically curls in on herself whenever someone touches her, or even *tries* to touch her; like, if they just reach out to her or something.

She absolutely hates even the idea of it.

The day they sat with Nancy and Jonathan he noticed how much it bothered Lilith when she forced herself to shake hands with Nancy, along with how grateful she was that Jonathan didn't seem to want to.

But, for some odd reason, she's fine with *him*.

She hugs him once in a while, obviously not tense or hesitant, and sometimes -when she ends up in his bed after having a nightmare- he'll find her arm draped across his chest and/or her head resting against his shoulder. When she wakes up like that, she doesn't seem at all bothered by the skin-to-skin contact that she usually hates so much.

At least, not as bothered -in a mostly good way- as Steve is when he wakes up first.

Steve feels like there's a very understandable reason for all of it; all the hatred towards even the smallest bump or poke from someone passing by -minus himself, of course- but he doesn't want to pry. It's definitely not a good reason, just understandable, and he doesn't want to make her uncomfortable by asking about it.

---

Small, dark spaces are comfortable for Lilith.

The day Steve wakes up to find Lilith hiding in his closet is the same day he finds that out.

He went to open it, not expecting to find her there, so he jumped back and shouted in surprise.

She's sitting inside, on the floor inside, against a pillow that's propped up against a box with the door closed and her headphones on. He can hear *The Who* playing softly, which tells him she has the volume cranked to a deafening level. He has to pull them off her head for her to notice him.

She looks up at him with wide eyes, "O-oh. Hey."

Her eyes are red and her face is blotchy which means she's been crying. He can see the dried tear tracks running down her cheeks. She's still sniffing, too. Was it because of a nightmare she didn't want to wake him up for, or did she wake up in a panic and hide the same way he had a couple times in the past year?

"Hey there." He replies softly, worry showing in his voice, and he pauses for a few seconds before he asks: "You okay?"

She sniffs again and nods.

"Nightmare?"

She shakes her head.

"Worse than a nightmare?"

There's a moment where she doesn't say or do anything, then she gives him a lazy shrug. He doesn't know why she suddenly doesn't

want to talk about or even acknowledge it, and all he wants to do is help her, but she won't let him! It's extremely frustrating but if he's learned anything from babysitting the Party, it's *patience*.

He takes a seat across from her in the closet, leaning against another box that's probably full of crap. Once he's sort of comfy he shuts the door and they end up in nearly-absolute darkness. Neither of them can make out the other's face perfectly, but they can at least see each other's silhouettes. She looks up at him in surprise, probably not expecting company in what Steve assumes is her Happy Place.

"What are you doing?" She asks with a giggle, the corner of her mouth turning up in a half smile that Steve can barely see, and will also take as a good sign.

"What, I can't hang out in my own closet?" He jokes.

Her half smile turns into a full-but-small smile that Steve counts as a victory against all the bad shit that's in her head, tormenting her. The stuff that, unlike Demo-whatever-the-fucks, he can't kill.

"You... like the dark?"

She shrugs and there's a fairly long pause before she answers in a low mumble. "Can't see shadows in the dark."

*Well shit.*

"True," he nods, "but, y'know, my blanket works the same. It's heavy enough to block out any light."

She nods.

"Plus, we wouldn't have to get out of it and squeeze in here together."

She straightens up suddenly, "You don't like being squeezed in here with me?"

"What? No, no! That's not what I meant! I-"

A giggle cuts him off, "I'm screwin' with you."

Oh.

"Not cool." He says with a smile, pretending to glare at her even though she can't see him at the moment.

The next time Lilith has one of those worse-than-a-nightmare nightmares, she wakes Steve up while apologizing over and over for it. He simply pats her back and swiftly covers them both in the heavy comforter to drown them in darkness.

He hears a click somewhere in the room, cursing at himself for probably knocking something off his bedside table. Lilith sniffs as she wipes her hand under her nose, then smiles at him with tears running down her cheeks.

In the morning Steve is surprised to find his bedroom door locked. He knows he didn't lock it the night before and is certain Lilith didn't, but he's too tired in that moment to really care about or question it.

---

Lilith doesn't eat.

Like... *ever*.

She's small and thin and barely eats, and it worries Steve sometimes. she skips most meals, nibbles on a small amount of food during lunch at school, and sometimes outright refuses to eat. He tried to force her to eat more than usual once, but that ended in a shouting match followed by a couple hours of cold shoulder and silent treatment.

He doesn't want to go through that again, so he keeps his mouth shut now, but it still bothers him a lot. Sometimes he wonders how she's survived this long on such little food everyday. She's seventeen, 5'5" tall, and maybe weighs a hundred pounds.

It's not healthy.

He asks her why one day, as he's making breakfast. She refused his offer of toast, opting for a glass of orange juice and some *air*, watching as he makes scrambled eggs. She looks hungry but refuses to admit it.

She shrugs and says nothing. He persists until she cracks.

"I'm used to it, okay?" She snaps. "There were a couple years when I was younger where I was given really small portions of food two times a day at most, and if I didn't like something I didn't eat at all. I would save up the stuff I *did* like and... ration it, I guess? *That* turned into this thing where I don't eat a lot. And if I eat more than I'm used to I get sick."

"Oh... Well," He takes the pan off the burner so he can turn around and look at her without worrying about burning his food, "Eggs are... light? Yeah, *light*. Toast too. Please just try it?"

She huffs and crosses her arms, looking like a small child now. A child who's pouting because their parents wouldn't give them a cookie or some shit. He has to hold back a smile because the sight is actually pretty funny, but he has to keep a straight face to show her how serious he is right now.

"For me?" He adds with that smile he knows she can't resist.

She looks at him out of the corner of her eye, catches sight of the smile, and sighs dramatically.

Internally, Steve is cheering. Maybe he can work her up to actual meals now. Soon, she'll be eating about half as much as he does, which would still be quite a bit. Then, just maybe, she won't feel so breakable when he hugs her.

Everytime they hug he can feel her ribs.

Whenever he grabs her by the wrist he worries about how thin it is.

He's seen her running laps in gym a couple times and he usually finds himself wondering how legs that thin could keep her standing, let alone run for so long.

And the few times he's had to pick her up, he's shocked her with how light she is.

He dumps his eggs onto a plate and hands it to her. She picks at them while he makes himself a new batch, looking over his shoulder every

few minutes to check if she's actually eating or if she's just pushing the yellow blobs around the dish. When he sees her shove a forkful of it in her mouth his mood lifts.

She's eating something substantial without much more of a fight and he's proud.

Day by day he gets her to eat more until, finally, she's eating the same amount of food anyone else her size should and would normally eat. It takes weeks, but it happens. Her ribs aren't so prominent and she gets a little heavier. Not a concerning 'heavier', just a healthy 'heavier'.

She no longer has the waistline of a Barbie Doll is all he's saying, and he's happy about it.

---

The day Steve finds out just how vicious Lilith can get is a day filled with worry and pride.

And a little bit of pain as well.

He was worried because of the way Billy was looking at Lilith, and because he didn't want her getting in trouble for defending him.

He was proud because, despite how freaking tiny she is compared to the bully in question, she still stood up to him.

*Spoiler Alert: she won.*

It all starts when the boys are coming in from an outdoor P.E. session. This means they get to walk past the girls as they wrap up the last few minutes of class. They're finishing a game of Dodgeball at that moment, and the other boys are watching with hunger and hormone filled eyes. It almost looks like a pack of dogs eyeing a Gym full of juicy steaks.

Steve watches the very familiar redhead he endearingly calls 'Lil' duck and weave as the girls on the opposite side of the court hurl red rubber balls at her head.

He's not the only one watching her though.

Lilith may think she's completely invisible to every other teenager at Hawkins High, but she's wrong. Most of the time she would be, but it's mainly because people tend to ignore someone who wears ripped jeans and baggy hoodies everyday.

Any other time, though...

Like *right now*, for example.

The girl's Gym uniform is a lot like the boy's; shorts and a tight t-shirt, no exceptions. And on the girl's it's a lot more flattering. Going back to his earlier 'dogs drooling of steak' joke, it turns them all into walking pieces of meat with nice butts, legs and chests. Steve doesn't think of them like that anymore. Not that he really did before! It's just that now the uniforms don't interest him as much.

But they seem like the greatest invention ever to the guys around him.

*Like Billy.*

He comes over to Steve, clapping him on the back so hard it interrupts his breathing for a second, and puts on one of those fake shit-eating grins he's so good at.

"She's cute, Harrington. Good job."

The tone of Billy's voice is disturbing and sends shivers of disgust up Steve's spine. Ever since that day in the hall when Lilith punched him in the face, Billy has had some kind of intense hate-boner for Lilith, and he likes to bug Steve with it whenever he gets the chance.

He squares his shoulders and tries to put on his best 'menacing glare' he can before he gives Billy a warning, "Don't you dare, Hargrove."

Steve knows he'll probably lose the next fight they get into, and that the next fight will probably start because of Billy's snarky remarks about one of his friends -most likely Lilith, because Billy seems to think they're dating- but he'll keep up the tough act no matter what.

Steve could always go get his bat, but right now he's in the middle of the Gymnasium, glaring up at the slightly taller boy while he tries to

defend his roommate, out-matched in the strength department - sometimes his face and head *still* hurt- and sadly empty-handed.

The glaring match gets out of hand, quickly evolving into a real fight.

It starts with one sentence that Steve only hears half of before he shoves Billy.

Something about getting Lilith on her knees and then there's a ringing silence. It's the same noise he heard when he woke up in a speeding car to find *Max driving* it; but this time it's from pure rage and not a concussion. After that comment Steve shoves Billy hard into the wall, eliciting a few gasps and quiet cheers from the other boys around them. Billy smirks as he gets his footing back, then stomps forward and shoves Steve so hard he falls over.

"I thought I told you to plant your feet." He sneers.

Steve is so done with Billy and his shit. He gets off the floor faster than he ever thought he could and rushes Billy, pinning him against the wall. That's when he hears the girls coming to join everyone else. They want to see the fight too, apparently. The teacher isn't around to break it up, so the two boys continue.

Billy right-hooks Steve, and Steve is surprised by how little it hurts. Like, *it definitely hurts*, just a lot less than that first punch when they fought in November. He ends up letting go of Billy, then hauls back and sends a punch right back. He can feel his knuckles crack in a weird way as his fist connects with Billy's cheekbone.

And then, suddenly, Lilith is between them. She puts a hand on Steve's chest to push him back, to keep him away from his source of rage, and then turns to Billy with what could only be called 'The Scariest Death-Glare Anyone Has Ever Seen'. A glare only Mini Wheeler's telekinetic girlfriend could rival.

Billy smirks at her, "What, Gingersnap? You mad I-"

He doesn't get to finish that due to Lilith *kicking him square in the balls*. He crumples to the ground as he lets out a long, pained groan and after a couple seconds, he vomits. Steve can't help his little huff

of laughter at Billy being taken down, yet again, by teeny-tiny Lilith.

"Don't call me 'Gingersnap', and leave my friends alone!" She yells.

It's probably the most anyone -besides Steve- has ever heard her say.

After that it's a blur of: the Nurse's Office, some ice packs, the Principal's Office, mentions of detention but the ultimate decision of a three day suspension for all three of them. And at the end of it all Max, bear-hugs the shit out of her new role model as she thanks her multiple times for putting Billy in his Goddamn place.

Lilith tenses, but lets the hug last for a while, running her fingers through the younger redhead's hair gently and lovingly.

"My pleasure, MadMax."

Lilith seems to have a soft spot for his kids as well.

*That* is probably the best discovery Steve has made so far.

---

**Just thought I'd give y'all a look at things I didn't want to write full chapters on, but still wanted to share with you.**

**Oh, and that first punch that Billy threw at Steve 'not hurting'?**

**Yeah. That was Lil softening the blow with her mind powers.**

**Nobody hurts her/my Steve!**

**I hope I didn't disappoint anyone with this chapter.**

**Comment with some kind of cute moment or quirk you think Steve might have and I'll put it in the 'Lilith's Eyes' version of this chapter. I'd love to see what y'all come up with.**

**Until next time~**

**\*Waves\***

## 21. Chapter 21

"C'mon, it'll be fun."

Steve has been trying for an hour now to convince Lilith to help him babysit. Hopper has a daughter that nobody knew about -"for good reasons," Steve assures- and Steve was asked to watch her tonight. Hopper had to work late and Steve is the only person he really trusts besides the ever-busy Byers/Wheeler pair to watch over his offspring.

"I'm sure you guys will get along."

She raises an eyebrow, giving him a look. He's had no luck so far, what makes him think that one little sentence is going to wor-

*Oh, for the love of God!*

He's smiling at her. It's that sad half-smile that makes all her stubbornness just melt away. She hates it when he does that, and she knows he knows that. That's why he does it. It's like when little kids use puppy-dog eyes to get something from their parents.

*Fighting dirty, that's what it is.*

"I asked Hopper and he's cool with it."

"Steve..." She whines.

"Please." he begs, "It's so Goddamn boring with just me and her. She's quiet, you're quiet, maybe you guys could... bond?"

He doesn't seem too sure of his own words but he's trying anyways, and he already used the smile...

She crosses her arms and sighs, "Fine."

The way he cheers is adorable, jumping off the couch and pumping his fists in the air like he just won one of his Basketball games.

---

The cabin Hopper lives in is small, decrepit, covered in moss, and

hidden in the woods off the side of a main road; isolated from everyone else.

The Chief has a rule about parking by the road, which is only a ten minute walk away, so she really doesn't understand why they can't park directly in front of the cabin. Steve tries his best to explain why when she asks, but he's obviously leaving some things out. When he has to warn her about a *tripwire* of all things, she starts to wonder if Jim Hopper is some kind of crazy mixed with overprotective-dad.

The special knock Steve uses -*two knocks, one knock, three knocks*- just convinces her he is..

The locks click, the door flies open, and suddenly there's a thirteen year old girl standing in front of them. Mike's girlfriend, Jane, smiles and steps aside to let the two older kids in. Steve ruffles her hair as he passes and Lilith gives her a little wave.

"Jane," Steve starts once they're inside and the door is closed, "This is Lilith."

Jane nods once, "Hello again."

Lilith nods and despite her pure hatred of physical contact holds out her hand to the smaller girl, who smiles and takes it, shaking it a few times.

That's when Lilith sees it.

## 011

Right there on Jane's thin wrist, in dark but faded ink.

She doesn't realize she's stopped breathing until Jane gives her a funny look, and that's when she finally lets go of her small hand.

Deep down, Lilith freaking the fuck out as she tries to think about something else, but her mind is wandering to some pretty dark places and assumptions.

*Is Hopper one of the Lab Guys, but he felt bad and got Jane out?  
Did she get away on her own?*

*Are any of the lab people in Hawkins **right now**?!*

She's shocked by how good she is at not hyperventilating while the thoughts race through her head at a mile a minute, causing a slight panic attack accompanied by some minor chest pains, and she so *badly* wants to ask Jane about some of it. But knows that if she was in Jane's position she wouldn't want to answer any questions about her past.

It still gives Lilith nightmares, even though she wasn't there for long and has been free for almost seven years.

*Seven, ha. My lucky number*, she thinks bitterly.

"I need some air." She says a little too quickly, before she runs out the door.

She drops herself onto the top step of the small staircase that comes off the patio, watching something, everything, *nothing*. She doesn't know what, she just wants to be out of the cabin for a bit so she can decide whether or not to say anything about their 'connection'.

Could it even be called that?

Lilith was taken from her home in Kansas to a small lab in Montana, then escaped and went on the road with a traveling side-show until she got to Hawkins. She obviously wasn't from the same lab as Jane, and definitely wasn't as new to everything as the younger girl seemed to be.

*Holy crap...*

Is Jane from the lab that shut down in December?!

"Lil?"

She turns to look at Steve and his concerned expression.

"One sec." She responds.

He nods and retreats, and she waits for a second before she stands, dusting off the back of her jeans.

If she's going to say anything to Jane it will be when Steve isn't there to hear it.

*But...*

If Hopper trusts Steve to watch her, does that mean Steve knows Jane is 'special'?

*He probably does, yeah.*

Which helps. It helps a lot, actually, because that means he won't freak out and she won't lose her best friend/boyfriend. He might even be pleasantly surprised. She likes that idea, especially when it's accompanied by the mental image of his wide eyes and the thought that he might even call her 'cool'.

That's the 'Best Case Scenario' for sure.

'Worst Case' is he never talks to her again.

She has more faith in 'Best Case' but there's always a small chance it won't go the way she wants.

When she walks back inside she sits down on the couch next to Jane while unbuttoning her leather cuff -the one she usually never takes off- without looking at it. It slips off and she instinctively covers the inside of her wrist with her other hand.

Jane notices and gives Lilith a look that asks her what's wrong, and that's when Lilith thinks *it's now or never*.

"I have a secret that's just between you and me." She whispers, "You can't tell Steve or Hopper or your friends, because I don't want them to look at me funny or freak out, okay?"

She seems to understand without any complaints or questions.

She probably has a few secrets of her own she hasn't told anyone yet.

"Thanks. You rock, kid."

Slowly, hesitantly, she reaches her hand out with her wrist up. Jane's

eyes widen and her head snaps up so she can stare into Lilith's eyes.

"Don't freak out." She jokes quietly with a half-smile and a nervous chuckle.

"Seven." Jane says sadly, then looks down at her lap. "Why don't you tell?"

"Because people *knowing* is what put me in the lab."

Lilith gives the short version of the important stuff. A nicer version of how she was taken away, her short time in the lab, some of the assignments they gave her along with the punishments that came when she couldn't or wouldn't do something, and a less bloody retelling of her escape.

She sighs when she's done and adds, "The most I can do is throw small things when I'm angry."

Lilith chooses to keep her non-physical abilities to herself for now.

"I broke the windows." Jane looks around the cabin and Lilith notices a couple of boarded up windows along with the newer-looking glass ones. "Hopper replaced some but..."

"I think that's normal for people like us." Lilith says with a shrug.

Jane grins and after a long pause she points at herself, "El."

Lilith grins back, "I like it. You can choose between *Lilith* or *Lil*. *Sev* is okay too, I guess, but only if we're alone."

*El* nods, still with that adorably wide smile.

Lilith puts her bracelet back on when she hears Steve coming up behind them.

"You two gossiping about me?" he jokes, eyebrow raised and a grin on his face.

She turns to him and smirks, then back to El and the two girls giggle. Steve ruffles El's hair again before he walks around the couch and

takes a seat beside the older of the two. They watch a movie, snack on popcorn and Eggos, and just chill.

It's a nice night away from Steve's too-fancy-for-her house. The cabin is almost like a bigger version of the trailer; falling apart and kind of messy, but still comfy. 'Rustic' if you want to sound fancy, 'home-y' if you want to sound less stuck up.

If they ever move Lilith will gladly buy the cabin off Hopper.

---

After that night Lilith goes back to the cabin whenever she can. Usually with Steve, but sometimes on her own. Hopper trusts her enough to do that, apparently.

She's never had a *cop* trust her before.

The trust most likely comes from how well her and El get along, and possibly El convincing Hopper that Lilith is worthy of said trust.

Sometimes, when they want to talk but can't meet, El will reach out to Lilith in the Void so they can chat in peace.

It's easier to hold the connection when the person you're contacting has the same abilities as you, and usually El can't hold a conversation with someone. She normally listens one-sidedly as the other persons speaks, but now it's two-sided and El couldn't be happier about that.

She managed to converse with someone only once, but that ended up in flashes and a string of meaningful words running on repeat from her catatonic mother.

They talk about everything and nothing. About their separate lab experiences and about school. About what they've used their powers to do and about their friends. About their old families and even more about their new ones. Lilith is finally able to get things off her chest knowing that El will keep her promise to not tell anyone they know about it all and El is just happy to have someone who understands, but isn't out for revenge at the same time.

*They both just want to be 'normal'.*

Sometimes all you need is someone you can relate to. Plus, they both agree that Lilith's experience with integrating back into society will help El adjust when she's finally allowed to get out into the real world; which will be next year, hopefully.

"You'll be in your first year of high school." Lilith tells El during one of their Void chats, "And I'll be in my last."

El nods.

"I'll help you. I mean, Nancy and Jonathan will too, but I know how hard it is to hold back when other kids are..." She searches for a good word that won't be horrible for El to repeat in front of Hopper.

"Mouth-breathers?" El offers.

Lilith laughs, "Yeah, 'mouth-breathers'."

"Promise?" El whispers, like she thinks she's stupid for asking.

Lilith nods with a grin, "Promise."

---

**Lil bit of Lilith/El bonding for y'all.**

**So, yeah, Lilith is a lab kid.**

**But she was in and out pretty quickly, just like Kali, because obviously kidnapped children will be harder to control over a long period of time than a kid who thinks you're their parent from Day One onward.**

**Hope this didn't seem dumb to you.**

***See you soon!***

## 22. Chapter 22

Dating is weird, Lilith decides.

She doesn't really understand how it works. All she knows is that you can't kiss or screw or go on a date with anyone besides the person you call your girlfriend/boyfriend. It also means you don't lie to them, or keep secrets, or go behind their back.

It's all about *loyalty* and *trust*.

Sometimes she wonders if she's even either of those things, and most times she comes to the conclusion that: '*no, she's not*'.

Every time she looks at him, she wants to tell him *everything*.

If he wraps his arms around her, it feels like someone has just stabbed her in the chest.

Whenever they share a quick kiss she feels so, so guilty.

It's *agony* but she's just so scared.

Absolutely, positively terrified.

She doesn't know what his reaction will be. Especially if he finds out El knew before he did, and that even *then* she still kept everything a secret; kept *lying to him*. The thought of Steve bailing right then and there is enough to make her want to cry.

There's even a few times where she starts to say it. She'll start with '*hey*' and then trails off as Steve stares at her, waiting for her to continue, and then a wave of terror washes over her and she gives up. Says '*never mind*' and goes back to whatever she was doing before she spoke up.

Those days are the worst.

Today is one of those days.

They spend the morning, a bright and cheerful Saturday morning,

lounging around in Steve's room. Nobody else is home. His parents are off on one of his father's many business trips and Troy is... *somewhere that isn't there*. Neither of them really cares about the finer details of Troy's life so they didn't bother asking where he was going when he left earlier.

Steve is on his back, eyes closed, arms behind his head. They're listening to a tape Lilith picked out and popped into Steve's sound system. It's mostly calm music, stuff that Lilith uses to mellow herself out when she's having a really bad day, and Steve is gently nodding his head along to the beat.

Lilith is sitting up against the headboard of the bed, drawing and biting her nails. She looks at Steve every few minutes and that guilty feeling hits her like a punch to the chest, but from the inside. It's horrible, and she finds herself opening and closing her mouth like a Goddamn fish, trying to find the words to tell him but failing miserably every time.

She groans, then gasps. She hadn't meant to do it for real! It was supposed to be an internal groan.

Steve opens his eyes and frowns at her, "What's wrong?"

"Uh-" Her brain freezes before any real words can come out, leaving her sitting there with her mouth hanging open like the moron she's sure she is. "I, uh-"

"You okay?"

"No...?"

"Are you asking me, or telling me?"

"I have no fuckin' clue."

"Okay, well, is there anything that might make you feel better?"

And there he goes again: sweet and caring and all hers.

But then here *she* is: lying and hiding things and somehow still his.

"We could, I don't know... makeout?"

She watches as his eyes grow wide, and then close as he laughs; a proper hands-on-his-stomach laugh from deep down in his belly that has him curling up on his side. She doesn't understand why it's so funny, and she doesn't get a chance to ask either. Before she can say anything, he's on his hands and knees, crawling over her until their faces are less than an inch apart and she can feel his breath tickle her nose and lips.

And when they finally kiss she forgets everything, but only for as long as they're lips are locked.

When he pulls away the guilt fills her again and she feels that fucking corkscrew stab and twist in her chest again. She whines in frustration, a sound Steve takes as a good thing considering what they were just doing, and then she pulls him back to her; throws her arms over his shoulder and tangles her fingers through his hair and practically slams her mouth into his.

That's how she keeps her secret.

For a little while longer, anyway.

She distracts herself with the fun things she's supposed to do with the guy she calls her 'boyfriend'.

---

Just a small (778 words without the AN) thing full of Lilith's anxiety about normal people (even people she feels really connected to) finding out about her powers.

I like doing short things like this, with all the sad/angsty/feels stuff. And I like the idea of Steve being a good distraction for Lilith, even if he's distracting her from *himself*. Which he is.

Anyways, this was mostly done because I've got writers block again.

But also because I'm trying to figure out how the fuck to write a Stranger Things/IT (2017) crossover idea I had a few days ago. I'll never be able to write Richie properly, and the crossover

would be just Eddie and Richie (as a *pairing* because I love my adorable gay ships), and then the whole Party, and that "Why do you have my face?!" moment between Richie and Mike that I love reading.

But that's enough about *me*.

I hope you had a good weekend (it's 2am on a Monday as I write this) and I'll see you when I update again!

## 23. Chapter 23

I was listening to "1985" by *Bowling For Soup* and I found it kinda funny how the song basically makes fun of a woman for being obsessed with that year, but then here we all are; obsessed with a show set during the two years before 1985, writing fanfics for it and junk.

I don't know why, but I thought that was kinda weird...

Anyway, on with the fic!

---

Lilith wakes up because of Steve tossing and turning next to her in bed.

He mutters and whimpers and moans as he shifts around. Grips the blanket in his fist and then lets go, repeating the process over and over again. He's absolutely drenched in sweat. She watches him with worried eyes and a small frown because, compared to all the others, this is the worst nightmare she has ever seen him go through.

She gently places a hand on his arm, feeling just how damp and cold his skin is. It's nearly Summer now, how is he so /cold/? She rubs his arm slowly, hoping it might comfort him just a little, as she watches his eyebrows furrow and then ease back up again and again.

He looks like he's in pain...

*Fuck it*, she thinks as she places her other hand on his arm.

She closes her eyes, concentrates on breathing slowly, tries as best she can to reach out to his... what should she even call it?

Brainwaves?

Mind-Energy?

*Aura?*

Ha, it all sounds so stupid. But that's exactly what it is; basically, sort

of a radio signal from his -or anyone else's- mind that she can listen to like she just tuned into a very personal radio Talk Show.

---

*Steve's nightmare is empty yet terrifying.*

*There's a constant clicking noise in the distance, a sound that's very familiar but impossible for her to place at the moment, and it sends shivers down her spine.*

*She calls his name and gets no answer.*

*Then there's a loud yelp from somewhere far away, and she follows it.*

*The world around her is almost pitch black and smells like rotten meat. It's so cold that goosebumps rise across her skin. The ground under her feet is uneven, like she's walking across a field of large roots.*

*It takes a while to find Steve, but there he is. A nail-studded baseball bat in his hands, raised above his head, ready to swing it down on the dog-like creature in front of him.*

*It chitters, the same noise she heard before, then opens its mouth the same way the monster in her nightmares does.*

*She gasps when it lunges at Steve. He swings the bat to the side, clocking the monster-dog's open face in mid-air. It flies to the left and disappears in a cloud of flaky ash.*

*"Steve!" She yells.*

*He turns to her with wide eyes, fear etched into his features, and runs to her. The bat stays clutched in his hands and held over his shoulder in case he needs to use it again.*

*"Lil?" He asks when he reaches her, "What're y-"*

*"You gotta wake up!" She hurriedly tells him, "You're having a nightmare and you need to wake up."*

*His face scrunches in confusion, and maybe even a little bit of anger. "No, this is-"*

"Steve, shut up and listen. **This-**" she gestures to the darkness as another monster makes that signature noise of theirs, "-isn't real. You're dreaming. Please wake up!"

"No... This is- The Demodog- I-"

"All a dream." It's nearly a whisper, but still loud enough for him to hear. "Please, you need to wake up. You're scaring me..."

*The last part is only half-true.*

*She's more worried than scared. There's still a bit of fear from the newly acquired information that Steve dreams about things she also dreams about; a monster she's only ever seen in dreams. He sees a version of it that's more like a dog and she sees one with human-like limbs, but the same head.*

*Except he fights them like a Goddamn **hero**, while she runs away like a fucking **coward**.*

**All you ever do is run**, an unfamiliar voice tells her.

*She shakes her head to get rid of it.*

"We're leaving."

*She takes his hand and pulls him along behind her, walking off into the dark of the distance with no actual destination in mind.*

---

Steve wakes up with a gasp, shooting up to a sitting position, chest heaving. He shivers and pulls the blanket further up his body as he looks around his room. It's still dark out. The only light he can find comes from the moon shining in through the blinds. Lilith isn't next to him but her side of the bed is warm, so she couldn't have left more than a minute or two ago.

He lays back down and sighs just as she walks into the room.

"You're up." She says, surprised.

"Yeah. Bad dream."

"I could kinda tell. You were rolling around a lot."

"Did I wake you up?"

She shakes her head, crawling back into bed slowly.

"Oh. Good."

She shrugs, "Wanna go back to sleep? We've got, like, four hours 'til school."

Steve groans and rubs at his eyes, "Why not, then."

Lilith giggles, then lays down and wraps an arm around his waist, nuzzling his shoulder with her nose. He smiles when he feels her smile against his arm. She pulls the blanket over herself and snuggles into him. Two minutes later, she's asleep while he's still up, just thinking.

He doesn't sleep at all after that, yet doesn't feel tired at all through the entire day.

He keeps thinking about the tail end of his nightmare. The way Dream Lilith came to him and told him to wake up, how she was dressed exactly like she was before he fell asleep that night, the feeling of her hand in his when she pulled him away.

*It all felt so real...*

It replays over and over in the back of his head, like a skipping record.

But all-in-all, he's grateful that Dream Lilith woke him up. That nightmare was bad, like a mix of all the fear from both of the times he had to deal with inter-dimensional monsters, but with only *one* to fight. And every time he killed it, it would just come back like it never left in the first place!

He hopes Dream Lilith comes back the next time he has a nightmare like that because she's a better wake-up call than a Demodog lunging at his face, that's for damn sure.

---

**A little look into the more powerful portion of Lil's powers; the mental stuff.**

**That's all I've got for now, sorry.**

**See ya next time!**

## 24. Chapter 24

Have a little El/Lil bonding session.

And Hopper's Dad-ness starting to kick into overdrive, I guess.

---

"Bitchin'."

It's the word El uses to describe Lilith every time the two girls see each other. Lilith has no idea where the younger girl learned the word, at least not this version of it's many meanings, but she kind of likes the way it sound coming from her 'little sister'. It makes her sound cool and makes her feel more confident. Maybe even gives her a sense of pride in her weird-to-everyone-else style choice.

She likes dark colours and black seems to really bring out the green in her eyes, so she layers it around them, and baggy hoodies and loose jeans are super comfy. This is the only reason behind her choices in fashion. Why should she not feel *bitchin'* in it?

One of the days where Lilith takes full control of babysitting El -Steve using the chance to take a much needed nap at home- she is greeted by the usual *bitchin'*, but instead of smiling and thanking the younger girl Lilith holds up an extra bag she brought along.

"You get to be bitchin' today, too." She tells El.

El's face lights up and the door slams shut behind them, all of the locks clicking shut in a matter of seconds; a speed that would be impossible if done by hand.

Lilith grins, and El grins back.

They set up in the living room because the lighting is better in there, spreading the contents of Lilith's second bag across the table. She sets up one of those big magnifying make-up mirrors in the middle of the mess and shows El how to use it.

Lilith came over with less make-up on than usual so she could show her little sister how to apply it herself, using her own face as a

demonstration tool.

El watches in fascination as Lilith draws the eyeliner pencil across the bottom of her eye, then spreads a decent amount of black powder on her eyelid. She tries not to smudge it too much, using a brush she bought just for today to apply the eyeshadow instead of the 'finger brush' she prefers.

Then she does El's make-up the same way, telling her that the demonstration was so she could practice later.

"I've never done someone else's make-up before, and big sister's are supposed to do it for their little sisters."

El nods and then closes her eyes, still smiling.

*So cute*, Lilith internally coos.

"So, you actually like the punk look?"

"Yes." El replies so she doesn't mess up the makeover by nodding.

"I heard about your, um, *look* from last year. Sounded cool, but more 'Rough Punk' than 'Casual Punk'."

"Different?" Els asks, "Yours and mine?"

"Yep. *My Punk* is usually t-shirts either with logos of bands that Jonathan likes on them or in just plain dark colours; ripped jeans, and sometimes a leather jacket. Heavy boots sometimes, Converse other times." Lilith explains as she lightly wipes the brush across the eyeshadow compact, then across one of El's closed eyes. "The other Punk is what you wore. The suit jacket and light jeans, with grey smudges around your eyes and gel in your hair. By the way, I love your curls. Don't change it, kid. It'll look *wicked* when it gets longer."

Lilith ruffles her mop of curls and El giggles.

"Wicked." She parrots with a grin.

Lilith nods, "The kind of curls people would pay hundreds of bucks for in a salon."

"Really?"

"Totally. You ever seen Max's brother Billy?"

"Yes."

"Well, he definitely payed a lot of money to get hair like that. It doesn't suit him, but it suits you."

"Suit? Like the jacket?"

"When something 'suits you', it looks good on you. The curls look better on you than that-"

"Mouth-breather."

"Yeah, right, *that*." Lilith chuckles, then adds: "Don't repeat any of the bad words I say to Hop, please. I actually like being alive most days, so I don't want him to kill me."

"Promise."

She breathes a mental sigh of relief.

*Oh, good. El knows that expression.*

---

When Hopper comes home he finds the girls in El's bedroom. El trying on some of the darker hand-me-downs Nancy had gifted her while Lilith tells her to twirl and pose. It's a two woman fashion show and El's smile is enough to calm the weird feeling Hopper gets when he sees her kohl smudged eyes.

Bad memories mix with slight panic at the sight. He's taken back to the night she closed the Gate, the way she looked with those dark eyes and blood stains all over her face.

He also worries about what the make-up means...

Is she going to keep the punk look now?

Will she be doing this everyday when she gets into high school?

Will she put it on every day? Even *before* she goes to school?

But then he sees her smile and hears her giggles, and he softens. So what if she looks like that everyday? It could help disguise her while simultaneously scaring away any boys that might take an interest in her. It might even scare off that Wheeler kid.

Well, probably not, but a dad can dream.

The look on his adoptive daughter's face as she twirls and laughs with the older girl she likes so much brings a small smile to Hopper's face.

El sees him mid-twirl and runs over to give him one of the tightest hugs he's ever gotten, while Lilith politely but awkwardly waves and smiles from her place on El's bed.

She always seems so scared of him and he's not sure if it's because he's a pretty big guy, or if it's his semi-permanent scowl, or maybe the fact that he's the Chief of Police -that usually freaks out every teenager he comes across- but the way she shrinks away from him any time he steps too close makes him feel bad.

It also reminds him a little of El, back when he first brought her to the cabin. She would flinch at any loud noise or his raised voice, and curl in on herself if he reached out for her or got too close. She pushed him away with her powers once, put a good three feet or so between them, then apologized and scurried off to her bedroom.

That's what Lilith looks like right now, just older.

And after taking a look at her mother Hopper doesn't blame her. Most of the girl's arrests were that woman's fault because she was told to steal something, or left at the scene of the crime, or was the unsuspecting driver of the get away vehicle. Not to mention her mother was a nasty drunk. Hopper had seen the quiet girl with randomly placed bruises more times than he would care to admit, and he knew they weren't from fights at school.

She doesn't bruise as easily now that she is staying with Harrington.

He tells Lilith she can stay for the night, but only because it's Saturday and he doesn't feel like driving her home this late. He also

doesn't want to break up the fun just yet, but he'll keep that part to himself.

---

The two girls end up staying awake until way past midnight. Mostly talking, but also just watching the ceiling of El's room. They don't need to talk out loud; they can do it in their heads. And sometimes, with enough concentration on both sides, Lilith shows El places she's been to since she was young.

When they finally fall asleep it happens at the same time; in the middle of a conversation, cuddled up to each other the way sisters that are close usually do.

Lilith doesn't dream of monsters that night, and neither does El.

---

Just thought I'd give you every song I've used/referenced so far in this fic.

Ch. 7:

1. "Carry on my Wayward Son" by *Kansas* (the band was referenced, not the title. It's just my *Kansas* go-to song cuz it's the *Supernatural* theme song)

2. Everyone knows *The Police* and their song "Every Breath You Take"!

3. "Time After Time" by *Cyndi Lauper*

Ch. 21:

1. "Cruel to be Kind" by *Nick Lowe* (there's also a great cover of it by *Letters to Cleo*)

2. "Burning Love" by *Elvis*

3. "Little Queenie" by *Chuck Berry* (but you should know that cuz I named the song in that section)

4. "Cut My Hair" by *The Who*

PS. I actually have a playlist with 31 songs in it that help me get

into the right headspace for this fic. Including the songs I just listed. And you'll be getting more as we go along, don't you worry.

*Okay, bye!*

## 25. Chapter 25

Sometimes I think about writing a Billy/OC fanfic, and usually when I think about that I end up having to put on "Little Red Riding Hood" by *Sam The Sham The Pharaohs*. It makes me think about how Billy might follow a girl around that he found more interesting than the rest of the girls in Hawkins.

And when that's over I listen to the song by *The Sham-ettes* called "Hey There, Big Bad Wolf" because it's the girl's side of the whole thing and it seems like the exact response the OC would have.

But that's an idea I'll probably never follow through on.

Speaking of music:

I use music to help myself feel things properly and I think I'm projecting that onto Lilith...

And maybe Steve too. He knows Lilith does that, so he does it too and that's kinda how the two of them communicate sometimes.

\*nervous smile\*

But that honestly has nothing to do with this chapter, I just needed to rant about it for second because I've recently been sucked into the world of Harringrove and that has made me *just a little obsessed* with *Billy Hargrove* of all characters!

Also, sorry for how long I was gone. I've kinda been working on the Reveal Chapter, which will be a few parts. Just Like Steve's birthday was.

So... yeah. Here's a little thing to maybe make up for my absence!

---

There are times when Lilith loves Nancy Wheeler, really, there are. Nancy can be great company and it's always nice to have a girl friend that isn't four years younger than you. But that's only ninety percent

of the time to be honest, because there are also times where she wants to wring the girl's neck like it's a wet cloth.

Like *right now*, for example.

At the moment Steve is looking at Lilith likes she's crazy, and it's all because she had decided she needed to tell him something. Three simple words that meant a lot to her and were proof to her that she was getting better at trusting people. Proof that she was feeling *good things* again.

*I love you*

It came out so easily, but only because she wasn't looking at him when she said it. She was focused on a sketch of Mike that she had promised to do for El forever ago.

She just *had* to look up, though.

Wide eyes, slack jaw, eyebrows pretty much in his hairline.

*Not good, not good, not good...*

Then he snorts and her heart drops into her stomach.

"You don't believe me?"

"Wha- no, that's not it. I ju-"

She doesn't hear the rest of it. Knows it's all just a rambling excuse that wont mean anything. She knows he doesn't believe her and she knows *why*.

It's mostly due to his parents and how neglectful they are. The few things she's heard about them from him have been rants about them being passive-aggressively shitty people. They don't hit him or outright tell him they don't care, but they show it and imply it and it's made it hard for Steve to trust what people say.

They have said *I love you* to him many times, but they never mean it and they probably never will.

But the one who really fucked it all up was *Nancy*.

Lilith knows that somehow Nancy got through to Steve, made him believe it when she said it to him, knows he loved her too and said it back only because he believed her. Then she had to go and mess it all up, bring those Goddamn walls of his back up by breaking his heart. She doesn't know the whole story and she refuses to listen to the rumors, but she knows that Nancy Wheeler screwed Steve Harrington up royally with however she dumped him.

"Whatever." She mutters as she goes to get off the bed.

"What?"

She's standing now, so she turns to face him and give him a deadpan expression hoping it might help him *get it*.

"I meant it, I *mean* it, and now I'm guna leave for a bit to let it sink in."

"Wait, don't g-"

"I'm also guna find Nancy and bash her face in-"

"What the actual fuck, Lilith!"

*Oh, so we're back to my full name now?*

She holds her hands up in surrender, "Kidding, kidding. But I'm not stupid, Steve, and I can tell there are Nancy related things that make you think I'm playin' a cruel fuckin' joke, but I'm *not*."

"Nancy has noth-"

She puts her hands on her hips, the pose he does when the brats when they're pissing him off. "Who spent two months being creepy, watching you like a hawk, saw *everything*?"

He doesn't respond.

"I did. And I'm observant, Steve. I see things people don't want me to because it's what I'm best at."

*Also because I've **literally** been inside your head.*

"I know you've got trust issues when it comes to this-" She gestures... everywhere. It's just them in the room with awkwardness in the air around them and she feels like that's the best example of *'this'*. "-and I've got trust issues with *everything* people say or do, but I would believe anything you told me. *Anything*."

Still nothing but an open-mouthed stare from Steve.

"But, hey, I'll say it as many times as it takes because *Lord knows* I've always wanted someone to say it to *me*."

He's got eyes like saucers again and she realizes just how loaded that last part of her sentence had been. She slaps a hand over her mouth and her own eyes widen.

They stare at each other.

"I- I'm sorry! I didn't mean to say it like that. It sounds like I'm trying to pressure you into saying it and I don't wanna do that. Don't wanna force you to say anything. It just came out and-"

"Lil, calm down, it's fine."

Steve practically jumps over and off the bed to get to her. Wraps her in a hug that doesn't even let her squirm. Rests his chin on the top of her head and sighs. She can feel his breath on her scalp and she knows it's kind of creepy, but the feeling of it calms her down a little bit.

"Okay... so you might be a little right." He tells her.

*HA!*

"But that doesn't mean you can go kick Nancy's ass."

"Why not?" She asks, voice muffled because her face is burried in his shirt.

"Because she's my friend."

"But-"

"No. It's a firm 'no', Lil."

She huffs, but snuggles into his chest and sighs contentedly because this closeness is enough. She's okay with never hearing him say those three little words if he does this every now and then.

"Still though," She starts, tilting her head so she can peer up at him past her hair and his jaw. He pulls back a bit so they can properly look at each other. "I do."

He smiles and it's like fireworks go off in her heart and stomach.

The smile is a good sign, but also-

*Pretty, pretty, pretty, pretty.*

Yeah... that.

They sit back down on his bed and cuddle while one of her tapes plays in the background quietly, and she absentmindedly wonders if what just happened counts as a fight. Not that it really matters considering it was resolved so quickly, but does it count? She gives a mental shrug and tells herself that fights are healthy once in a while and that this fight got them to *talk*, so it's not a big deal.

Er, they *sort of talked*.

Lilith did most of the talking, but feelings got across and they made up and everything is okay.

*For now...*

She frowns and tells the taunting foreign voice to shut it's trap, then gets back to her promised drawing.

## 26. Chapter 26

Okay, so, my new Theme song for this fic is: "I Was An Island" by *Allison Weiss*.

I listen to it and imagine Lilith singing it or something.  
Just thought I should let y'all know that : D

Warning: Lil is super casual about something that's kinda fucked up, but she's just so done with feeling bad for bad people and this was a *bad person* (when they were alone together anyway) soooooooooo... *yeah*.

Oh and:

*Roses are red  
Violets are blue  
Alcohol is cheaper  
Than dinner for two*

*Love, CD.*

Can you tell how much I love Valentine's Day?!

No?

Good, 'cause I really fuckin' hate it.

But I hope you have a good one this year with whoever/ whatever or just y'know, single. That thing I always am and always will be.

Hope you enjoy the chapter!

---

When they call her down to the Principal's Office over the PA system she assumes she's in trouble. That thought turns into full blown *fear of being arrested* when she finds the Chief waiting for her with the principal. But then Hopper gives her this *look* -like pity and apologetic had a freaking baby- and the fear is gone. Replaced by concern and confusion.

"T'm guna need you to come with me, kid." He tells her.

Without a word the two of them leave the building, students and teachers staring as he escorts her to his truck. The ride to the station is quiet, the radio is off and neither of them say a word. She nervously taps her heel on the floor, earning a couple glances from the corner of Hopper's eye.

All she can think is *what did that woman do this time?* and *how much is bail gonna cost?* and *will she let me come back to the trailer if I bail her out?*.

*The trailer*, not *home*. That place isn't 'home' anymore. 'Home' doesn't exist for Lilith, really. She couldn't even call Steve's place 'home' because she's hiding in his room, and that's not what 'home' should be. Maybe once the old bitch died she could go back to calling the cramped trailer 'home', but until then she'll be breaking into her boyfriend's room through the window.

Which, honestly, isn't even that bad.

Kinda *fun*, actually.

Once they get into the station Hopper leads Lilith to his office and sits her down. He looks grim, like he's about to tell her something she doesn't want to hear.

"Your mom, she-"

"What'd she do this time? 'Cause, to be completely honest, I don't really wanna bail her out again."

"No, kid. She... She got into an accident." He rubs the back of his neck, refusing to look at her. "She's dead."

There's silence as the news washes over her. She has nothing to say, nothing *good* anyways, and she knows that she looks like a deer caught in headlights right now; eyes wide and full of... everything.

She's feeling everything right now and she needs a minute to process the new information.

"Kid? You alright?"

*Okay, done processing.*

She hops out of her chair in a sudden fit of excitement, forgetting about manners and social norms for this sort of situation and cheers, pumping both fists in the air.

"Fuck yeah, I'm okay!" She says, and it's followed by breathy laughter and a wide grin.

Hopper clears his throat and she flushes, then sits back down and apologizes quietly.

"That was..." He trails off and then comes back with, "What the Hell was that?"

"Ding-dong the witch is dead!" She sing-songs, as if *that* will explain everything.

"You-" Hopper pauses to look at her in disbelief, "You're a weird kid. But I get it. I know how shitty your mom could be."

"You only saw the stuff *after* we moved here." She counters.

He nods and then jumps into explaining things to her.

The car is fine besides the hole in windshield that Zara went through and the front bumper has a huge dent in the center from ramming into a tree. It's in the shop, waiting to get fixed. He even offers to help her pay for it, but she declines. She has enough money stashes away, secretly built up over the years little by little, and there's probably enough by now to pay for the car.

Then he tells her about what will probably happen with Social Services and all that junk, because she's still under age.

"Lemme tell you a secret, Hop." She leans over his desk, cupping a hand around the side of her mouth to pretend-whisper something to him. "Social Services wont work."

He raises and eyebrow, "And why is that?"

"Because the government definitely *isn't* your friend, and Z didn't

exactly *legally* adopt me."

Which is all true.

The stupid government took her when they caught wind of her abilities, and whisked her away and do... *things*. Experiments. Tests. Examinations. She was sure they even faked her death or something to make sure nobody looked for her. Missing kids attract a lot of attention, but dead kids are an unfortunate circumstance of life that people don't pay too much attention to.

Lilith found Z and her sketchy family when she ran away from the lab. After a week walking through woods without food or water or a shower. She had been so, so hungry but didn't have any money to get food from the stand the Caravan always set up, and the man working at it wouldn't take pity on her no matter how pathetic she looked at that moment.

So, she used her weak telekinesis to pick someone's wallet right out of their pocket. Zara watched it happen and immediately asked if Lilith wanted to stay with them.

And because of some stuff the lab did to her she couldn't remember her own name -*still* can't, as a matter of fact- but she knew it started with L. So Zara, with her shitty sense of humor, named the little girl she just found after a woman from Jewish lore.

A slutty 'demon of the night' that stole babies in the dark, and sometimes ate them

*Lilith.*

Then, on around day three or four of her new life with the Caravan, things got *bad*. Her new mother became the Wicked Witch of Wherever-They-Were-At-The-Time. Only kept Lilith around for her 'unique' way of picking pockets and her stage skills. She could preform so many tricks that required pullies and strings and special effects *without them*, which meant less work for the rest of the family.

Lilith figured out pretty quick that she had to grin and bare it if she wanted to stay.

Hopper sighs, "Y'know what? Do whatever you want."

"Really?"

"Yeah, I don't really care as long as you don't do anything stupid."

"Cool, thanks."

She's about to get up when he asks another question.

"Where are you staying right now?"

"I guess I can go back to the trailer now that she's gone. She kicked me out a while back, but-" She stops and her smile falls, replaced by a look of sheer horror. "*Oh God! I have to clean up a mess she's been working on for **four months!***" She covers her face with her hands and lets out a strangled moan that ends in a sort of growling noise.

"Where've you been 'til now?"

"Steve's." She says it like she thinks the admission might get her in trouble, "He's been hiding me. Not so hard to do with how little his parents are around."

Hopper smiles and holds back a chuckle.

First it was that Wheeler kid hiding El in his basement for a week, and now Harrington had a girl in his *room* for... What did she say? Four months? To Hopper it seems like soon enough he'll be hearing about the Sinclair kid hiding that redheaded girl from their group in his bathroom. Or maybe Henderson will be keeping one of those fucking 'Demodog' in his shed like it's an actual dog!

The world is too weird for even Hopper to handle sometimes.

He walks her to the front door and asks if she needs a ride home as she pushes the door open. She looks outside and laughs, then turns back to Hopper and smiles. Tells him her ride is already waiting for her.

Sure enough, there's the Harrington's kid waiting patiently on the hood of his car, tapping his foot the way Lilith had been during the

ride to the station.

"Don't worry, Chief. I can take care of myself." She laughs before she continues, "Fuck, I took care of myself *and* Z's lazy, alcoholic ass for years! I think I can handle just me. I'm pretty low maintenance."

"I just don't think you should be staying at a *boy's* place, is all."

"Gettin' fatherly on me now, Chief?"

He shrugs and whispers, "Jane likes you. Says she doesn't get to see you enough. You could stay with us for a night."

She smirks at him. "Asking me to babysit, huh? You got a date tonight?"

"No, just thought she could use one of those *girl's night* things Joyce and Nancy talk about all the damn time."

She thinks it over for a couple seconds, then nods. "That'd be pretty rad."

He snorts but doesn't reply, doesn't really get a chance to, actually. She's already laughing, on her way out the door, and he watches her hop down the steps before he goes back to his office to look over some paperwork.

---

"Lil, Jesus *fuck*, what happened!?" Steve shouts.

He notices her grin as she gets closer, and then suddenly she jumps him, wrapping her arms around his neck as she giggles.

She's... *happy*?

He wraps his arms around her waist and pulls her closer, bends down and presses his mouth into her shoulder and speaks into it, making his words muffled. "Good news?"

"She's dead."

The statement comes out sounding a lot happier than she wanted it

to, but she is happy about it, so why hide it?

The bitch is dead and Lilith is finally free of being a full-time caretaker to an ungrateful woman who loved spending every cent Lilith made on booze and Camels. The woman who made her life half-hell and half-heaven. The liar who taught her how to hustle and pickpocket and cheat her way through life.

She's gone.

Death has never made her happy before, and probably never will again.

"You're happy about it?"

She nods against him, her nose squished against his collarbone in a very uncomfortable way.

"Good, 'cause so am I. And if you weren't that would make it really awkward."

She giggles and Steve suggests some kind of celebration, shakes her head.

"Hopper asked me to hang with you-know-who, told me to stay over tonight. Even went all Dad Mode on me when I said I was staying with you."

"You told him?"

She shrugs, "He asked."

"Well, if he asked then sure! Tell the big scary Chief of Police you were shacking up with a guy. The guy you have deemed worthy of 'boyfriend status', I might add."

"Chill it with the sarcasm, *boyfriend*." She narrows her eyes, adds a small smirk to show she's just teasing him. "S'not like he's my actual dad or something."

"I guess." He sighs, "But still! He acts like you are and he kinda scares me."

"He scares me too, but I'm cute so he doesn't get mad when I bother him."

With that, she ends the argument right there because she knows it could go on forever with how both of them are.

They break apart when Steve says they should go pick up her things and then hop into his car. If Lilith is free to go home now, she might as well take her things to Hopper's; that way she can go back to the trailer afterwards without the extra trip back to Steve's house.

*Another 'good day for all the wrong reasons',* she muses as Steve drives away from the station.

---

El is informed about what happened over the radio, so when they pull up to the cabin and get inside, she gives Lilith the same look Hopper did in the office at school; the love-child expression of *Pity* and *I'm Sorry*.

"Your mama died?" She asks innocently.

Lilith scoffs as she sets her bag down by the couch, then looks up at El and smiles.

"That woman was *not* my mama. To be honest, she was more like the 'bad men' than anything else."

El's eyes widen. She nods in understanding.

Hopper leaves them alone in cabin because he trusts the two quiet girls to stay that way; quiet. And also inside. He explicitly tells them to *stay inside*.

If Lilith wasn't secretly in on the whole 'El has powers' thing she would probably think this amount of over-protectiveness was creepy and unnecessary, but she knows, so she's all for it. She would be in hiding if she had been through everything El had, so she kind of understands where Hopper is coming from with all of this.

Once he's gone, the two of them have conversation closer to the norm. Mostly about powers and practicing with them, but also

something new.

El brings up *Kali*.

"Other sister."

Other sister...

*Other sister?!*

"So you've met another one of us?"

El nods, "Eight."

"Well shit." She flops back dramatically on the couch, her arms held straight above her, hands gripping the edge of the pillow that's just barely under her head. "Is she cool?"

"Cool?"

"Rad, wicked, fun, bitchin'..."

"Bitchin'!" El happily exclaims.

"Sweet! Can't wait to meet her one day."

"One day." El parrots and then adds, "Soon."

Lilith sits up suddenly, staring with wide eyes at her little sister.  
"Excuse me?"

"Coming to visit."

*Oh, Hopper is **so** not guna like that...*

## 27. Chapter 27

Continuing the storyline from the last chapter!

It's short, but that's because I didn't have much to add and I wanted to put *something* out after 13 days of nothingness.

I don't do enough of these connected chapters, do I?

No?

Well, that's a shame...

Love y'all~!

---

After a day and a bit of simply hanging out with El at the cabin, doing nothing of real importance but also cleaning the cabin from top to bottom out of pure restlessness, Lilith tells herself that she needs to get back to the trailer. It's probably a fucking pigsty because Z was alone for so long with just her laziness and bad habits, and Lilith wants to start cleaning it up right away if she's going to be living there now.

Steve tells her he wants to help because it's Saturday and neither of them have any other plans, which means they're both free for the entire day. She says he doesn't have to but he insists. The sweetness in his voice and expression make her melt and give in even faster than that fucking smile he usually uses to get his way.

Mostly, she just wants some alone time with him, in a place that nobody really knows about or goes to.

He picks her up at Hopper's and drives them both to the trailer, Lilith giving him directions the entire way there because Z made sure to hide them on the edge of Hawkins for some stupid reason. It was probably to make running away easier for them if need be, but who really knows or cares now?

"What're you guna do with the car?" Steve asks her when they find the wrecked vehicle sitting outside the even more wrecked trailer.

"Sell it." She says with a shrug, "Get a motorcycle. I've always wanted a motorcycle."

"A motorcycle?"

"Yep." She pops the P at the end. "Wanna be my bitch?"

He laughs, "Excuse me?"

"The person riding on the back is 'riding bitch'. That would make *you* my bitch." She gives him a look that says 'duh' and he laughs again.

"Why is it called that?"

"No clue. It just is. Wanna?"

"On two conditions. One, you actually know how to drive a motorcycle because I don't wanna die. And two, you teach me so we can switch it up every once in a while."

She gives him a cheeky smile. "You've got a deal, Pretty Boy."

Steve rolls his eyes at the nickname. Ever since the first time she heard Billy call him 'Pretty Boy' she's been using it in private. He seems to actually like it when it comes from her, though, which is nice.

They shake hands like a couple of businessmen making a big corporate deal. Then Lilith gets closer, stands on her toes, and kisses him. Just a quick peck on the lips that leaves him just a bit stunned. Not a lot, but just stunned enough to keep him frozen for a second because he still isn't used to that kind of affection yet; the gentle, quick, innocent affection. It's been a while since he's had anything like it and sometimes he manages to convince himself it's all in his head; like a really vivid hallucination.

Lilith is always there to convince him it's all real.

---

When everything is done -or *mostly* done, anyway- the two teens stop in the kitchen for a bit. It had been the first place they started on and now it's basically spotless; save for a few permanent stains the

counters and floors collected over the years. As they look over the semi-sparkling kitchenette, Lilith promises to make him dinner at least once in it. Apparently the Home Ec classes she was forced into and making meals for her lazy mother everyday for a few years have made her pretty good in the kitchen.

She even laughs and asks, "Guess I'm a freakin' stereotype now, huh?."

Steve just smiles in response. Shrugs his shoulders. There's no way to answer that question without offending someone, somewhere.

"Wanna beer?"

He watches Lilith open the tiny fridge and bend down into it, the entire top half of her body disappearing behind the door. He smiles when she pops back up with a six pack in her raised hand and a grin on her face.

"When did you get that?"

"Z loved her booze, but a bottle of something strong is expensive." She closes the fridge and sets the beer on the counter, then gets to work removing the plastic thing that keeps them together. "Cheap beer gets you just as drunk as Whisky. Tastes the same amount of *fuckin' horrible* too."

He sighs dramatically, "So true."

"You know how to shotgun?" She asks with a smirk.

Steve responds with a smirk of his own and a nod, then suddenly Lilith is handing him a knife from the block on the counter and they're counting down. The floor ends up covered in beer, as does their clothes, but neither cares and they do it again. Stab, open, chug, gasp, smile, and repeat. It's three cans each. Doesn't take too long.

A nice little party, just for the two of them.

Later, when they're both lounging on the couch and Lilith's control over her 'snooping ability' is dampened because of the alcohol in her system, she'll accidentally get a good look into Steve's head, and once

inside she'll get a look at the party; the one where Barb was taken by the monster.

The beer and shotgunning them and the moment Barb cut herself.

The *blood* that got her *killed*.

Less interestingly and more uncomfortably, she'll get too close of a look at Nancy's face in the middle of sex, sex with *Steve*, and it will make her kind of nauseous. But she'll blame the nausea on the beer because she doesn't want to admit it's really from jealousy. And maybe a bit of insecurity

She will also notice that Steve has been not-so keen on parties since learning the truth about that night. That tonight kind of helped him deal with it a bit, showed him that letting loose once in a while doesn't *always* get someone killed, and she'll think that it's totally worth the hangover caused by both the booze *and* the excessive accidental use of her powers that waits for her in the morning.

---

Now that the dingy little hitch-em-up trailer was cleaned and some stuff had been moved around, it actually felt like a home. A home Lilith would want to go back to, to live in, to make her own. No more cigarette smoke clouds, no more booze bottles thrown at her or the wall, no more shitty guardians shouting expletives at her for something stupid.

And she could get some alone time with Steve without his fucking brother around or both of them worrying that his parents would make their monthly visit, only to discover their older son had been harboring a homeless girl. She wouldn't have to climb up that stupidly tall house to get inside through his window as often. Or have to jump out of that same window to avoid anyone that might be downstairs whenever she leaves.

Mostly, she's just happy to have a small space to call *hers*. She hasn't had anything like that since before the lab, but even then she didn't feel like her room was *hers*. It was just a small space to hold her things inside a bigger space that belonged to a pair of adults that *didn't want her*.

The day after it's all cleaned up, when she's hanging with her friends-holy shit, she has *friends!*- at lunch, she leans closer to Steve and whispers in his ear.

"My place or yours tonight?"

It's meant as a joke of sorts, a stupid thing that most people only say to some stranger they're about to hook up with for the first and only time, but Steve seems to take it seriously.

When she pulls away she can see his dopey smile and slightly pink cheeks, and gets a little swell of pride in her chest for making him blush so easily. Then he's leaning into *her* space and whispering in *her* ear.

"Yours, definitely."

She turns so red that her cheeks must match her Goddamn hair.

## 28. Chapter 28

So, I saw David Harbour (Hopper) on *Drunk History* last week and that shit was great! He wasn't the one talking, but he matched the drunk person's sassy-ness so well with his hand movements and expressions that my face hurt from smiling so much when it was over.

I fuckin' *love* that guy.

Like, you have *no idea*.

And I really can't wait to see him play Hellboy in the new 2018 version!

---

"You should move the trailer."

Hopper had invited her over because El was getting restless, still overly worried about her sister's well-being after her *Not Mama* died. He came to the trailer to pick her up and when they were about halfway to the cabin he decided to drop *that* bomb.

"Is it parked illegally? Did someone complain?"

"No, no. I just... I don't think it's a safe spot."

"It's been there since we moved to town, Hop. Seven years ago."

"Exactly. People know it's there and I don't want the *wrong* people knowing."

"You mean the assholes from the lab."

(On a sarcastic side note: hadn't Revelation Day been fun?)

That's what she calls the day Hopper found out she was like El.)

It had been a complete accident and the air in the room got a little tension-y as she tried stumbling through a lie as to how the Hell she knew about Hop's daughter from *before*. He'd been thinking about the

tiny, blue-eyed blonde-haired girl named Sara as he sat on the couch with El, and Lilith had accidentally brushed against him. Skin touched skin and she got a quick flash of a tony face smiling, a hospital bed, and then a gravestone.

She ended up crying because she could *feel* his pain, his emotional pain that caused legitimate physical pain, and Lilith has *never* been very good at handling pain of any kind.

He asked her where the tears came from and she had stupidly replied with a whispered *I'm sorry about Sara*.

He looked both shocked and maybe a little ticked.

She tried the *rumors and gossip* excuse first because people in Hawkins *loved* to gossip, but it didn't sound very convincing through all of her stammering. Then it was *El told me about her*, to which El tuned in with *didn't* and Lilith had given the girl a death glare to end all death glares.

So, yeah, that had been a bust.

Eventually, what with Lilith shrinking in on herself out of pure panic and self-hatred for being so reckless with her words, El had to explain with her still limited vocabulary that Lilith was like her. Hopper hadn't freaked out like she thought he might, but he *did* have questions. Lilith had started with apologizing for snooping, told him it was involuntary if someone was focusing hard enough and she happened to get some skin to skin action.

After they talked about *her* and Sara and Hopper's *manly-man* feelings that he wouldn't fess up to willingly, he gave her the run down on Hawkins Lab and she'd cheered *called it* like a dumbass.

At least Hopper had laughed.

Now, back to the current conversation!

It was supposed to be a question but they both knew that he was definitely referring to *them*, so it came out as more of a sarcastic statement.

Hopper snorts and rolls his eyes. "No, I'm talking about that Hargrove kid." He says sarcastically, then side-glances at her with a tired smile and eyes full of concern. So much concern that she feels kind of shitty for making the joke in the first place. "Of course I mean the suits, kiddo."

"Where would I even put it?"

"Could park it by the cabin." He suggests, shrugging.

She eyes him suspiciously, a small smirk on her lips, arms crossed.

"You've wanted me to move in for a while, huh?"

"Shouldn't be living with a boy your own age, that's all. And El likes having you around."

"So do *you*, just admit it."

He shrugs again just as they pull up to the path to the cabin, "Maybe."

"Knew it!" She pumps a fist in the air, hitting the roof of the car. "Well, I like having somethin' close to a dad again. Er, one that isn't a *total* dick, anyway."

"So I'm just *a bit* of a dick?"

"All dad's are."

"Don't tell *her* that. Don't want her repeating anything the rest of you say, with all the damn cursing"

"Hate to break it to ya, Hop, but I've said some nasty shit in front of that girl already."

He glares at her.

"But she knows not to repeat any of it."

"She'd better." He grumbles.

---

**This is just another thing to tide everyone over while I work on**

**chapter 30.**

**By the way...**

***Holy shit, we're almost at chapter 30 already!? God Dayum!***

## 29. Chapter 29

**3,000+ words y'all, ain't ya happy?**

---

Joyce asks Lilith to stay over one night when she has to work a night shift, Jonathan is out with Nancy on a date, and Steve has Jane Duty. Lilith had declined hanging out with them because she wasn't feeling too great, had a headache that felt like ice-picks stabbing the backs of her eyes, and she was just going to lay in bed in her trailer but then Joyce called to ask if she could come over to watch Will.

Lilith knew that Nancy had planned a night out with Jonathan and she didn't want them to cancel their date just because Joyce is too scared to leave her younger son by himself. They've probably had to do that a few times now, and that's entirely unfair to all three kids involved.

Besides, she has a lot in common with Will, so it's not like she's going to complain about spending time with the kid.

There was a day when she told the Party that she drew the dragon Steve gave them, and that's when Will started to really warm up to her. They would trade drawings, or finish each others projects and call it a collaboration with matching grins. The end result of their shared artwork is always *so freakin' awesome!* There was also that time, one day after school, when he heard *The Clash* playing through her headphones.

Their friendship became a solid thing after that happened. A thing that was quiet and enjoyable when everything -or *everyone*- around them was too loud and annoying.

---

She gets to the Byers' place and Joyce rushes through a list of things. Rules and just-in-case stuff and when she'll be back, along with explaining that Will spaces out and walks around sometimes. She gives a quick explanation -a lie, actually- of how it has to do with the week he went missing, and the trauma of it. Tries her hardest to make it seem like it's not a big deal but also *a huge fucking deal* at the

same time. Then she runs out the door, hops in her car, and peels out of the driveway.

Lilith settles on the couch while Will sits cross-legged on the floor in front of the coffee table, and the two of them spend most of the night watching stupid TV and drawing together. She gives him tips on how to make a person look a little more realistic. He teaches her how to draw fantasy stuff, starting with the Party's D&D personas.

They're in the middle of an episode of *Dukes of Hazard* and their respective drawings when Will suddenly freezes. He drops the red crayon he'd been using and stares off into space with a look of horror. Lilith watches him curiously as he stands up and walks slowly to the front door, still staring at something she can't see.

Joyce had warned her that this might happen, but never told her what to do if it did. Does she go over and shake him out of it? Should she call Joyce at work? Maybe she should call Steve and ask him, because this might have happened to Will while *he* was babysitting.

Actually, no, she can do this on her own.

She thinks so, anyway...

Lilith stands up and cautiously makes her way over to Will, who has now opened the front door and walked out onto the front porch to stare at the night sky for some odd reason.

She snorts.

*'Odd reason'? This whole situation is 'odd'!*

Lilith gently places her hands on Will's shoulders and steers him back into the house, walking him over to one of the chairs in the kitchen so she can force him to sit down. Standing next to him with a hand still holding one of his shoulders, she takes a deep breath and closes her eyes. She has to calm down, just breathe and concentrate on the small body of strange energy sitting in front of her.

It takes a couple of minutes for anything to happen.

---

*Cold, dark, something that looks like snow floating through the air.*

*An open field with nothing around for miles but trees and sky and the floaters in the air.*

*She almost gasps, but manages to hold it back even though it's already halfway out of her throat. There's a voice in the back of her head nagging at her to stay quiet, and she decides listening to that voice is the best thing to do right now.*

*In front of her, a few feet away rather than right in front of her like he was minutes ago, is Will. His back is turned to her as he stares up at the sky. The dark, **dark** sky, completely devoid of stars and a moon.*

*"It's gone." He mumbles.*

*His quiet voice echoes across the empty lot, making it sound like they're in a small room instead of out in the open.*

*She wonders for a second what he means.*

*Is he talking about the moon and stars? Or is there something that's usually up there that she doesn't know about?*

*"It's **really** gone..."*

*She rushes over to him and places both hands on his shoulders again before asking what he means. It takes him a while to answer, she has to ask a couple times before he properly responds, and when he does he sounds so hazy that she starts to worry even more.*

*"The Mind Flayer. It's... gone. It's actually gone."*

*"The what?"*

*Silence.*

*"Y'know what? Nevermind. We gotta go. Now."*

*She pulls him back, holding him tight against her stomach and chest, wrapping her arms around his upper body to maybe keep them both warm in... wherever they are.*

*She takes two steps back, dragging Will along with her, but stops when she hears something.*

*(Low guttural groans and high-pitched screeches, accompanied by a clicking noise.)*

*She shudders and swallows the lump that just formed in her throat. Closes her eyes and tells herself to wake up, wake up, **wake up!***

*She opens her eyes and it's **there**.*

*(All terrifyingly lanky limbs, disgusting grey skin, and claws that could and most likely will kill her.)*

*Will sees it too, and finally snaps out of his trance. He turns his head to look up at Lilith over his shoulder with eyes just as wide and terrified as she thinks her own are. Then he turns completely around, seemingly trying to burrow into her midsection for safety, muttering over and over-*

*"Not again, not again, not again..."*

*She tightens her grip on him, one hand on the back of his head and the other arm wrapped around his shoulders, holding him as close as physically possible while she stares at the monster.*

*(It hunches down, then leaps at her with it's maw open and she knows this is the end.)*

*She squeezes her eyes shut then, and begs herself to pull them out of Will's dream. She doesn't want to come back into reality screaming along with him while the monster rips them apart into the dream world.*

*Or, y'know, possibly **die** in the dream to also **die** in real life.*

*She begs one last time to any deity out there as she hears the creature make that **horrible** sound again.*

---

They both come out of the episode with a sharp gasp. Lilith falls backwards onto her ass against the kitchen floor, hard, probably bruising her hip with the impact. Will whips around in his seat to stare at her. His face is the same as it had been in the dream, just

before he buried his face into her shirt.

*Eyes wide and terrified...*

She throws her hands up like she's surrendering and nervously exclaims, "Don't freak out!"

Will nods slowly in response.

A full five minutes pass before they sit down to talk.

Lilith's nose had started to bleed quite a bit while she was using her powers. So much, actually, that a small puddle formed just in front of where her feet had been, and she decided cleaning that up took priority over the impending questions they both had.

Also, she doesn't want to have this conversation and she's been stalling to avoid it, but it has happen sooner or later so...

*Should've just called someone*, she chastises bitterly.

She throws out the bloody toilet paper she'd used to clean herself up and checks for any left over blood under her nose or around her lips. Will is visible in the corner of the bathroom mirror, sitting on the closed toilet, patiently waiting for their little chat to begin.

She sighs, turns, and leans back against the sink.

Surprisingly, he the first thing he asks about has very little to do with her powers.

"Does Steve know you can do that?"

She cringes and mutters a barely audible, "Not yet..."

"You should tell him."

"Well, I was trying to figure out how-"

"He wont freak out, if that's what you're worried about." He tells her, "He fought the monster during that week I went missing. It was guna eat Jonathan and he came in with his *bat*."

The conversation pauses for a second so she can process that information, and the line of Q&A that follows their break doesn't exactly line up all that well.

"Wait, your brother's seen that *thing* too?"

"We call it the Demogorgon, like the DnD monster."

"And Steve *fought* it?"

"It took me to another dimension. We call it the Upside Down."

"Who else?" She snaps, tone of voice unintentionally dipping into the pool of *panic* and *pissed off* that's been slowly filling up since they started their back-and-forth. "Who else has seen it?"

"The whole Party knows." He replies, obviously ignoring her the *way* she asked. "*It* took me, so the guys went out to look for me, but then some stuff happened. Jonathan and Nancy went hunting for it because Nancy was sure it took her friend Barb, then Steve showed up and he helped them try to kill it. I don't know *everything* because I wasn't actually there, but I'm sure they *all* know."

"Max too?"

"Yeah. Last year there was a new version of the monster and she helped fight them. She wasn't supposed to be there but she just... kinda got wrapped up in all this crap by accident, and now she knows all of it."

Lilith covers her face with her hands. She wants to scream, to cry, to hit something! Anything to distract herself, to make herself forget that this is even happening. Instead, she lets out a strained cross between a groan and a long-winded squeak and drops to the floor. Then brings her knees up to her chest and lets out a fairly pathetic-sounding whimper.

"But if you have powers, isn't that good?" Will asks, probably to shift the topic off of traumatic monsters.

"I wanted to get *away* from the bad shit!" She cries into her hands, "I dealt with that old bitch and her family for years just so I could get

away from it! And when we got here I thought *Oh, small town, nothing exciting will happen here*. But no! No, I find out that monsters are real and now someone *else* knows what I can do-

Will cuts her off with a rushed, "El can too!"

She laughs, a short and dry laugh that's more exhausted than anything else, and gives Will a tired smile. "I know. I saw the tattoo."

Lilith looks at her wrist, the one with the ever-present leather cuff, then reaches over and roughly takes it off so she can show him her number. When she holds her hand out and Will sees the tattoo on her wrist, he freezes for a couple seconds. But then he looks at her, and the dorky little smile he gives her slows down her pulse just enough to help her not feel so much like she's having a Goddamn heart attack.

"You're in luck!" He cheers dramatically, obviously trying to cheer Lilith up with theatrics. "Our weird little family loves taking in people with superpowers and tattoos."

"Family? Like you and Joyce an-"

"No, *everyone*." He rolls his eyes and she chuckles, "The guys, Max, Hopper and Mom, Steve, Nancy and Jonathan. They all accepted El, why not you too?"

Suddenly, Lilith is overcome with a sense of Hope; something she's never properly felt before. And it's accompanied by a feeling of elation and maybe even a little pride for having this stupid 'gift'. All these people, the 'weird little family' as Will called them, are accepting of people like Jane, which means other people like herself as well. All of them. If she told them what she could do she wouldn't have to hide anymore. Not from them, anyway.

But...

"No." She whispers, glancing up through her lashes at Will, who's giving her a weird look. "I can't. It's- it's cool. Freakin' *awesome*, actually. But I *can't*. Not right now, anyway."

He nods, "I get it."

"You do?"

"They'll treat you different." He says with a lazy shrug, "Everyone treated me like I was made of glass when I got back and I hated it. I still hate it. If you tell them, they might treat *you* differently too. My mom babies El sometimes because El was kind of, um, *childish* when they found her. She didn't talk much and didn't know what a lot of words meant or what some normal, everyday things were because the lab had her since she was born and never taught her stuff."

"They tried to erase my memories." Lilith tells him bitterly, "They stuck this thing in my face everyday for what felt like forever, and it would flash and my head would pound. Eventually I forgot stuff like my name, my family's faces, how old I was..."

"I coughed up slugs for *months* after I got back from the Upside Down. The Demogorgon laid eggs in my stomach with this weird tube that went down my thro-"

Lilith grimaces, "Dude, gross. Please don't."

They smile at each other then. Tired, sad smiles that radiate *I understand*, and then Will says, "Just promise you'll tell someone. Even if it's just Steve. It might be good to have someone you can talk to about... *stuff*."

She nods, "Do you have someone?"

Will looks down at his feet, "Nobody else was in there for a week and came out alive, so not *really*. But Nancy went though a Gate in the forest, and Hopper and Mom went in to get me. Plus, El was there for a little while after she killed it." He looks up again, smiling weakly at her. "I talked to Mike about the Mind Flayer last year, when everyone thought El was dead. He was the only one who wouldn't give up on her and he was sure he was able to feel her, I don't know, *presence* or something. I felt like that was close enough, but he was right and she's back now, so I'm crazy by myself again."

Lilith snorts just before she stands up. Once she's on her feet she rests her hands on her hips and smiles down at him.

Will is supposed to be a little ray of sunshine even though he's *all kinds* of fucked up. He's supposed to smile and show her that even the really bad shit can't keep you down all the time. But right now he's all frowns and sadness, and that's just not right in Lilith's opinion.

He looks up at her, confused by her sudden change in mood. Especially when she reaches out to take his hands and pulls him to his feet.

"I'm crazy too." She tells him, all serious and shit, but smiling at the same time. "I have nightmares if I don't sleep next to someone. Some of them are about this *thing* I'd never seen before tonight. A thing that's apparently named after a monster from some nerdy board game." She smirks at him and he gives her a small smile back, "And I'm crazy for using my weak-ass telekinesis to put force behind every punch I throw at Billy Hargrove, even though it wears me the Hell out."

He laughs as she pulls him out of the bathroom by his hands, both of them stepping awkwardly. Lilith because she can't see where she's going, and Will because she's going too fast for his short legs to keep up. He has to try his hardest not to stumble with every step.

"I'm crazy because according to the *normal* people-" she says *normal* like it's the worst insult imaginable. Will grins up at her. "-anyone who lives the way I have for the last decade has to be absolutely *nuts!*"

He laughs again, leading them down the hall to the living room. Once there, she spins them both around in quick circles, almost like they're dancing, but more like they're just stupidly trying to make themselves dizzy.

"And apparently I'm crazy for dating Steve Harrington. No clue *why*, exactly, but I've heard a bunch of people say so."

They slowly stop spinning until they're just standing there, looking at each other with matching dopey grins. Lilith lets go of Will's hands and drops down to crouch so she's at eye level with him because she feels like maybe being at the same height as him might help the point she's about to make sink in.

"You're *not* crazy. You've just seen some really traumatic, basically supernatural, shit. Shit that would give even the toughest adults issues. Hell, I'm sure Hopper would be having episodes like that too, if he'd been in your place. Nobody should ever have to see or go through that kinda thing, let alone a freakin' *kid*." Will's got this glassy thing going on with his eyes, but it doesn't look like she's lost him yet, so she continues. "I'm not guna treat you like glass, lil dude. If everyone does then it'll just screw with you, and all you really wanna do is be a normal kid, right?"

Instead of answering he asks, "Were you normal?"

"Before, yeah." She nods, the smirks. "I mean, I floated a cookie off the counter here and there, pushed a bully onto his ass with my mind once, and read my brother's mind a few times to get some blackmail material. Other than that I was your typical, American, outcast of a little girl."

"Cool."

"Meh." She gives a lazy half-shrug, then gets back into Serious Mode to continue her pep-talk. "Anyway, my point is that I'll never treat you the way everyone else does. And you can always ask your mom to call me instead of Steve. She might think you've got a crush on me-" He makes a disgusted face with a noise to match and she gives him a mock-hurt look in return, then rolls her eyes. "-*but*... at least I'll be here to pull you out of one of *those* again. We can talk, too. I think I know more than I should about all this Upside Down crap, but I need some info to go along with the stuff I've only *seen*."

"That sounds *really good*, actually."

"Like free therapy for *both* of us."

That's the first time Will hugs her and Lilith can't help but think that for someone so small, he's surprisingly *strong* when it comes to bear-hugs like that.

---

So, that's how *that* happens.

Lilith earns a permanent position as Will's babysitter when Joyce and Jonathan have other things going on. Sometimes Steve joins them, but about ninety percent of the time it's just the two of them.

She enjoys those days a lot.

They happen more often when Lilith explains to Joyce that payment isn't necessary. There's a bit of bickering before the woman finally gives in, albeit *very* reluctantly. Lilith has to convince her that's it's not because the Byers' financial situation, because Lilith is poor too. Sure, she could definitely use the cash, but she'll get a real job before she takes money from Joyce; who needs it more than Lilith does.

No, she takes the job because Will is honestly one of her top three favourites of the kids. Always has been, always will be; even before they're little chat about powers and acceptance. She likes that he's quiet and polite. It's stuff they have in common. Just like their shared artistic interests and similar taste in music.

She'll gladly do some pro-bono babysitting if it means chatting with a kid she's pretty fond of who:

- 1) Knows about her powers.
- 2) Is understanding of her reasons for not telling the others about said powers.
- 3) Is willing to be pseudo-therapist buddies with her.

It helps them both, and it's good for a little bit of fun now and then.

---

Now El *and* Will both know about Lilith, so that should be good for future chapters.

It might make Revelation Day (2.0) kinda awkward, maybe even give it a bit of tension, but that's all good, right?

I think so, at least.

Tell me what you think!(?)

### 30. Author's Note

I'm sorry to say this, but I'll be taking a break from this fanfiction for a while.

I'm stuck, I'm not in a real writing mood lately, and I'm not really sure where I even wanna go with this one anymore.

I *did* start a new fanfic with the whole Gypsy idea. 'Cause I've been watching a lot of Hemlock Grove lately and I liked the idea enough to make Lilith's family a fake Gypsy Caravan, so I figured *why not do a thing around it!*

And then there's the SPN/ST crossover focused on Billy and an OC.

And the other SPN crossover with Older!Dustin...

Shit, I really need to get a hold on these fanfics and just pick *one* to work on at a time.

Anyways, yeah, I'm taking a break. I'll try to write some more, maybe get a couple chapters done but not post them, definitely get my shit together, and then I'll be back.

Probably in like, I don't know, a couple months. One at least, three at most.

I make no promises, though. I might end up extending that deadline a couple times because I'm basically a professional procrastinator.

Thank you for understanding, I love you all.

- CD

## 31. Chapter 30

Y'all wanted to know more about Lil and how the lab got 'er?

Well here ya go!

PS. yes, I was trying to be cruel to her this chapter. Torturing my characters (in fanfics and/or original work) is what I do best. So I put my skills to work here.

I mean, what's worse than *this*.

Besides what happened with El's mom, I mean.

But I'm mostly focusing on the *kidnapped* side of Lil's story here. So, yeah, what could be worse than what is about to happen just below this A/N?

:D

---

She wakes up slowly and unhappily. There's sunlight in her eyes and it hurts, and she had a bad dream last night so she's grumpy. But then she remembers that today is a good day.

A great day!

*It's her birthday!*

She turns six today and nothing can keep her in a bad mood because she likes her birthday. It's the only day that Mommy and Daddy aren't mean to her, or to each other.

She jumps out of bed, not bothering to make her bed or change her clothes. It's Tuesday, which usually means she has to go to school, but Mommy and Daddy promised her that she could stay home today.

They've never let her skip school on her birthday before so her brain is whirling, curious about what they could be planning for her today.

Are they going somewhere? Doing something special? Is there going

to be a party?

She runs to the door and turns the knob, but it doesn't budge. She stares at it, twists it again, rattles it.

Nothing.

"Mommy! My door's stuck!" She shouts.

She tries again but it's still stuck.

"Daddy!" She cries, "Mommy!"

The only time her door gets locked is when she's in trouble. Y'know, timeouts and all that. So why was it locked **now**? She didn't do anything that deserved a timeout. They must have locked it by accident.

Heavy footsteps start coming towards her door and she smiles. That has to be Daddy coming to help her, he's the only person who walks that loud.

"Daddy?"

"Hey, Honey." He drawls.

He sounds funny. Like he's in trouble and trying to hide it. She wonders what's wrong. Asks him to open the door.

"Sorry, Sweetie." Mommy's voice comes through the door, "You need to stay in there for a little while."

"Why?" She whines, "Am I in trouble?"

There's a harsh, whispered conversation between them on the other side of the door, then Mommy talks again.

"Sort of. It's... *complicated*. You'll be out soon."

"But it's my birthday!"

She cries when Daddy barks at her to behave, telling her that she doesn't get everything she wants *just* because she was born a few

years ago today.

An hour goes by. Her tummy rumbles and she whines as she rubs it. *This is the worst birthday ever*, she thinks. Pouts and mumbles about how much she hates her parents. They were being mean, even though today is the one day they're supposed to be nice *no matter what*.

She doesn't understand why they're doing this.

She just wants to know what she did *wrong*.

Another hour passes before she hears footsteps again. They're loud, so they must be Daddy. She crosses her arms. If he's finally going to let her out he'll have to come in and drag her out because she's angry. The door unlocks and the footsteps come into her room, but the owner doesn't say anything. Then two more unmatched sets of footsteps come in and she turns around.

Three men in black suits stare down at her. They don't smile or talk to her like most adults do, they just stare. Then the one closest to her tips his head at her and the other two come towards her. She tries to scramble away but the men are big and fast and they get her before she can go anywhere.

As they drag her out the house, kicking and screaming and calling for help, she notices another man talking to Mommy and Daddy. They won't look at her and they don't try to help, they just talk to the man. Then he hands them a package and shakes Daddy's hand.

They wrestle her into the back of a van, the kind she's been told to stay away from because strangers with vans are *dangerous*, and they close the doors with a loud *slam*. Then the van starts moving and there's a sharp sting in the back of her neck before she falls asleep.

---

The next thing she knows, she's inside a small white room.

Strapped to a bed, with no hair, and a thick bandage wrapped around her wrist.

Her head is pounding and she feels like she's going to puke, but she didn't eat breakfast so that probably won't happen anytime soon.

Someone wheels in a big machine. They say nothing as they tinker with it, point it at her, and then they push a button and the lights start.

*The lights...*

The lights take away who you are so the people in white coats can tell you to be someone else.

No, not *someone* else.

*Something* else.

---

Those lights took a lot of things from her.

They took her name.

They took her age.

They took her family and with them went their names and faces and voices.

Okay, so the last one isn't *that* bad, but it still wasn't okay for them to do it without her permission. Either way, it took her a few years before she remembered any of the stuff before the lab and after she remembered all she could feel was *anger* and *hate*. Some of it was for the people who worked in the Lab, sure. But most of it was directed towards her parents.

*They sold her to the government...*

*As some kind of human experiment.*

*Of course she's fucking pissed!*

And for what? What reason could they have *possibly* had to do that to a six year old *that they created*!? She was a good kid! She did her chores and stayed out of fights at school, she was really smart for her age, and she stayed out of her parent's way...

The second she realized it was because they knew about her powers

was the same second she decided she was never going to use them again. That was why she stopped doing her 'tricks' for the eager crowds that found the Caravan in their town. She was going to pretend they didn't exist in the first place, even if that meant her New Mom was going to be mean, or kick her out, or give her back to the 'bad men'.

---

So...

I'm not *back*, but I'm also not *not back*.

I just thought I should put this up because the document was about to expire.

I'll be gone for another month or so, working on the next chapter and maybe some after that. Just remember that I haven't forgotten about this fic or all the people who (surprisingly) want to keep reading it.

Later, peeps!

## 32. Chapter 31

Sorry this took so long, I've been swamped and I got a *freakin' job holy shit*, so yeah!

Side Note: Did you know that after you use the word 'gone' too many times in a row it starts to look *wrong*? Cause I didn't and then it happened and I had to google search the word to make sure I was right.

OH, *and...*

To the *Oh Boy Anon* who commented on Chapter 21:

1) Age has nothing to do with 'understanding more about life'. It depends on your *experience*. And I'm fairly certain being 21 years old DOES NOT make you a genius on all the crap you commented about.

(I'm a year younger than you, by the way. And unlike you, *I* at least know how to *not be* a narcissistic, brag-y douche.)

2) This is a highly self-indulgent fic, and it's usually written when I've had basically no sleep whatsoever, so the character's personalities might fluctuate sometimes (mostly due to my shitty memory of what they're supposed to be like coupled with how tired I am). *That's all on me*. No need to analyze them so hard (*Or at all*). I know my OC, you don't. (*Mind your own business, pal.*)

3) You don't have to have Asperger's Syndrome to not like physical contact. It can also be caused by trauma from stuff like *abuse* and *rape*. I mean, I personally *hate* being touched (especially by strangers, but also by some family and friends) yet I *do not* have Asperger's or have any trauma related to being touched.

4) Lastly: I'm *soooo* sorry you 'think this could have been better' (*can you detect the sarcasm?*) but other people like it and I'm okay with it as of late, so you can either *deal with it* or *stop reading*.

Okay?

Okay.

Thanks!

Love y'all!

---

*Needles and sharp pains.*

*An ache in her skull that wont go away.*

*Someone yelling at her, threatening her, ordering her to do something she doesn't have the strength or understanding to complete.*

*They never told her how to do it, never actually trained her; they just sent her to a room and expected her to know things that she **didn't know**, to do things that she **couldn't do**.*

*She cries, they hit her, then they locker her in her room and don't feed her for a day or two.*

***That** pain is worse than the needles and slaps and being dragged around by big hands that leave marks on her arms. It's a sharp pain on her insides that make her whine like a wounded animal and curl up on her bed, crying even harder. Tries to push everything out and go to sleep.*

*Except, when she closes her eyes she sees terrible, horrible, grotesque things.*

*Things that wake her up screaming.*

*Things no one her age should ever see.*

*Age...*

*How old is she again?*

*She guesses the **007** inked into the skin on the inside of her wrist is her age, but then forgets about it because it's not as important as the pain she's in right now.*

*She cries until, finally, she falls asleep. But even then the pain doesn't go away.*

*The headaches and pangs of pain all over her body will always be there, always just under the surface, itching under her skin like millions of little bugs biting and stinging at her flesh. Searing pain sometimes, always hurting, just like the stupid 'gift' they want her to use everyday until she faints.*

---

Lilith wakes up, gasping, like she's been underwater too long.

She *feels* like she was, especially with the layer of cold sweat across basically every inch of her skin and how damp her hair is. It's plastered to her neck and back like a disgustingly wet cape.

Calming herself takes a lot longer than usual, probably because she decided to sleep in the trailer tonight. She knew she would be having more (worse) nightmares than usual for the next couple days. It is May, after all.

And May sucks the big one in her books.

It's a whirlwind of horrible, half-there memories and terrifying monsters, coupled with anger and irritation and a temporary short fuse. She's just a big ol' bomb of *fuck right off* waiting to implode or explode or *something* along those lines.

(Hopper has noticed, has asked her if she's okay, and she always lies about it. Doesn't want him to have to deal with her bullshit, too. And El? Well, that little girl can look right in to Lilith's messed up head, so she knows. She also knows not to ask about it because he has her own *anniversaries*.)

She doesn't want to wake Steve up with her nightmares, and she doesn't want to snap at him every time he speaks, so she avoids him as best she can without making him feel like she's pulling away for good. Plus, she knows him pretty well now. Well enough to know that if he saw how she was this week he would be constantly asking if she's okay, and Lilith can't handle that right now. She hates when he sees her like this and she hates it when he gets so overly

concerned for her.

She doesn't deserve it, and she's pretty sure she never will.

The rest of the night is spent drinking some bourbon she found stashed away and smoking a few of the Camels Z left behind, watching shitty late-night shows on her tiny piece-of-junk television. Static comes in and out and the sound is scratchy, but it's pretty decent once she gets drunk enough.

"Two days to go..." She mutters bitterly.

This is day thirteen of her self-destructive pattern, if anyone is wondering, and it's been steadily getting worse since day one.

---

Day fourteen goes basically the same way.

She does the usual weekday stuff like school and all that, then goes home and eats something quick before trying to sleep. The nightmare comes, the same one as the night before, and she jolts awake feeling like someone dumped cold water over her head.

After that she drinks and watches TV, but doesn't pick up the smokes because she doesn't want to get back into the habit. Not after how hard it was to quit the first time. Now they're only around for when she feels super stressed. They help cool down her nerves a bit, which is probably what most people smoke them for.

At one o'clock in the morning she decides to go over to Steve's. She needs the comfort he seems to radiate the same way a man stuck in the desert needs water. It's almost funny, in her Whiskey-soaked brain, how she sees him as some kind of cure-all medication that she can run to when she feels like shit. Something in the back of her head even jokes about how she wrapped him around her finger *just* so she could feel better whenever she feels the need.

She barks at it, telling it that it's *wrong*, out loud, and then laughs dryly.

"I'm losing my fucking mind." She mumbles to herself.

She leaves after that. Walks all the way from Hopper's secluded cabin to Steve's place in the pitch black of the night. Drunkenly scales the Harrington residence from the backyard, climbs through Steve's window even though she has a key to the front door and his parents aren't home and won't be for another week, then lays down next to him in bed.

He wakes up briefly, just to say *hi* and ask if she's okay, voice like gravel in his throat and *god it sounds amazing*.

She pats his cheek the way drunk people usually do to sober people. Lazily and nearly hard enough to sting, but still loving.

"Better, now."

He smiles at her and wraps his arm around her waist, pulls her closer, covers her with half the comforter. They get comfy, and she wonders for a second if she smells like the liquor she'd been swigging a while ago, wonders if Steve can smell it on her. But she really can't bring herself to care as much as usual because she feels *warm* and *comfy* and *safe* for the first time in two weeks.

All because she's with *him*.

---

It's the fifteenth of May, a Wednesday, and Lilith has completely shut down.

Steve notices all of this when he gets up that morning, but Lilith doesn't. Usually She's usually up before him, or she jumps up and races him to the bathroom when he gets up first. Today, though, she rolls over in bed and stays there. He tries to coax her into getting up but she refuses. He checks her temperature with the back of his hand when she grumpily mutters that she's not going *anywhere* today.

He hasn't properly seen her in about a week and a half, so he's a little more aware of the changes in her *everything*. Attitude, appearance, body language. The smell of cheap booze attached to her clothes and breath.

Sure, when she snuck in last night she seemed a little out of it, even

to a then very groggy Steve. But she's never been like *this* before.

"What's wrong?"

"Tired." She grumbles into the pillow.

"You're *never* tired. Not even when you don't sleep for *three days in a row*."

He watches her lay there, trying to think of what could have made her so...

Well, it *looks* like depression, but Steve isn't a doctor so he shouldn't be diagnosing her.

"M'fine."

"Friends don't lie."

He knows the signature catchphrase of the Nerd Herd has a bigger chance of getting the truth out of her than anything else. Even the smile he knows she can't say *no* to is no match for it. So he uses it, even though he feels childish when he does.

She sighs, but keeps quiet. The silence is so long that Steve starts wondering if she's going to answer him at all. He comes to the conclusion that *she's not* until she rolls over to face him. Her eyes show just how tired she is, with bags under them and the way they're sort of glazed over. She just looks so *done* with everything.

"It's stupid."

"So?"

"So you'll think I'm over-reacting."

"I call bull."

She sighs again.

"Lil, please, you're freaking me out."

"It's-" she stops to take a breath and closes her eyes, breathing in

through her nose and out through her mouth slowly. "It's my birthday."

Steve's eyes widen. Her *birthday*? How could she not *tell him*? Why is she so upset about it?

"A-are you mad that I didn't know, or-"

"No!" She sits up suddenly and grabs Steve by the shoulders. Shake him once before she continues, "No, nothing like that. In fact, I couldn't care *less* about that. I hate my birthday!"

"What? Why?"

"Shit happened when I was little." She explain vaguely, looking down at the bed as she takes her hands back from his shoulders. She shrugs like it's no big deal. "It made birthdays suck."

"How bad?"

"Bad enough that I get *weird* every year, even when I try my hardest not to."

Steve nods, looking her over. She doesn't look like the usual Lilith. Her hair is a little greasy and unbrushed, almost a tangled mess. Her eyes are red rimmed and the bags under them have gotten darker since they last saw each other. She's gotten paler too, if that was even humanly possible, making her freckles stand out even more.

Without thinking it through or even giving her a warning, he grabs Lilith and brings her in for a nearly bone-crushing hug. She yelps when he pulls her towards him, but then settles her head into the crook of his neck and sighs long and heavy. The breath that comes out of her nose tickles the juncture between his neck and shoulder, making him shiver.

He kisses her temple lightly and then pulls back to look at her face.

"I'll skip school with you." He tells her, and she giggles softly. "Seriously, just you and me today. *All* day. We can just lay here or go somewhere or chill on the couch."

"Steve, you need to go to school."

"So do you."

"*I'm* not the one planning on going to college." Lilith stares into his eyes with such a serious look that she almost doesn't seem like *her*. "But *you* are, and you need to go to school for that."

"Missing *one day* wont hurt!" He argues.

"It could!" She counters, "Besides, you drive the kids to school."

"I can fix that."

The argument ends there because Lilith doesn't have the energy to keep it up and Steve wont back down. Neither of them will win, so someone has to give up. That person is Lilith, and she does it with an exasperated sigh.

"Fine. Whatever. It's you're funeral."

Steve laughs and leans in to kiss her cheek, then tells her he'll be back in a minute as he rushes out of the room. Lilith nods at him before she slowly lowers herself back onto the bed. She pulls the blanket up to her chin and snuggles into the ultra-soft mattress until she looks like some kind of giant, fluffy lump on Steve's bed.

Once he's downstairs, he grabs the Super-Comm Dustin gifted him for Christmas off the coffee table because he'd rather tell the kids to bike to school than tell their parents he can't pick them up. When he goes back upstairs he finds the Lilith cocoon and tries not to laugh. It looks like someone attached her head to a pile of snow, then dumped their creation on his bed.

She also looks like she's sleeping, but she's not. He knows she not.

She falls asleep eventually though.

---

Lilith wakes up for the second time that day only because she suddenly becomes the bottom of a surprise dog-pile by a couple children.

*Steve's children*, she tells herself.

She's going to kill him, she swears she will. He's the only one who would let those rugrats into his house and he probably told them where she was and she is going to *murder him* for it. She doesn't have to patience to deal with a bunch of fourteen year old kids today. Not even her two favourites in the group of six.

She cracks one eye open to stare at Lucas and Mike, the two kids who like her the least, standing by the bed. Probably dragged upstairs by their friends, the ones on top of her. Dustin is sitting off to the side with a huge smile on his face, like he finds this whole scene too amusing to join in on, while Max and Will squash her into the mattress.

*El must be coming later*, she thinks.

She might have to dig six graves tonight, just to be safe.

"Why?" She groans into the pillow.

"Steve said you were being moody." Dustin tells her.

"That's *not* what he said." Max shoots back.

"So we came to cheer you up." Will says as he climbs off her back.

Max rolls off to lay beside her, on Steve's side of the bed. "Kinda helps that this bed is *so* comfy."

She hums in agreement.

"Why *all of you* though? I get why some of you came, but they-" she gestures in the general direction of the only two kind of-enemies she has in the group, "-don't even like me."

"Steve invited *Jane*." Max sing-songs El's legal name, probably with a shit-eating grin. Lilith can fucking *feel* it in the air. "That's why Wheeler's here."

She can also *feel* Mike's scowl.

"And *Lucas* only came because *Max* did."

Lilith snorts, reaches out to wrap an arm around Will's neck and pulls him down next to her, refusing to let go. He shakes with suppressed laughter the entire time.

"Since when do *you* tease people, William."

He doesn't answer, just laughs and blushes a little. Lilith wraps her other arm around Max and pulls her into a side hug too. Both of the kids are smiling like idiots, and Lilith is just smiling the way she thinks she should be. Because, sure, she's *happy*, somewhere deep down. But she doesn't have the energy to genuinely show it right now.

Then Steve has to go and ruin her double-cuddle by calling the kids downstairs because El has shown up with Hopper, which means Wheeler is out of the room and down the stairs before anyone else even turns around. Her two favourites help her sit up when she pretends to be too lazy to move and the three of them walk downstairs together, one under each of Lilith's arms. She needs the presence of these two sweet kids to keep her anchored or she might (figuratively) explode.

She just wanted some alone time with the amazing sedative in human form that she calls her boyfriend, was that so much to ask?

Whatever. They were here because Steve let something slip about her birthday. She knows how seriously their not-related family of weirdos takes birthdays, and who is she to deny them the partying opportunity, right? Plus, the sight of El breaking away from Mike to come give her a hug coupled with the look of betrayal and confusion on Mike's face make her feel kind of smug, and Lilith thinks she might like feeling smug today. And she *knows* she likes hugs from her little sister.

So yeah, she can deal.

She drops down onto the couch. Max and Will sit down on either side of her, and El practically skips over to plop down between Lilith's legs. The other kids stare, unused to how close the two girls are,

whereas Hopper snorts as he watches all those sets of small eyes widen. He sees it all the time now. El and Lilith are almost always cuddled up to each other when both of them are home at the cabin.

The two girls share a look. One full of meaning that nobody around them really understands, and then El asks, "Today?"

Lilith sighs and nods, "Yeah, today."

"Good." El tells her with a nod and a smile. "Now?"

"In a bit. I want cake and shit first."

"Language." Hopper warns. "How many times I gotta tell you that?"

"Tons. Hundreds and thousands of times. Keep doing it, Hop. Makes you sound more like a dad."

He snorts and crosses his arms, but doesn't reply. Lilith and El both grin at him like the little shits they like to be when they're around him.

"What's *today*?" Will asks from her left, poking his head in between her shoulder and El's. "Y'know, besides your birthday."

Lilith side-eyes him with a small smile, hoping it's a sad enough, *pleading* enough, look that he'll understand without words.

He doesn't.

She sighs.

El knows, can see that saying it without letting everyone know prematurely is hard for Lilith, and whispers *truth* as quietly as possible so only the three of them hear it.

He nods.

*Thank God!*

Nobody brought gifts, and Lilith is thankful for that. She doesn't want them to give her anything. Hell, she doesn't even want cake, but it's

there and it has eighteen burning candles jammed through the thick layer of icing on top of it, and it's her favourite combo of vanilla cake with fudge icing, so she'll definitely eat it. She maintains the fact that she *did not* ask for it, but it's a sweet gesture and she's willing to admit that she very nearly cried when Steve walked into the room with it.

She blows out the candles like she's told and then suddenly every kid is diving in for a piece.

Now that *that* whole thing is done Hop has to go. As he turns to leave he asks Lilith to come with him. Apparently he wants to have a private talk with her for a minute. She follows behind him wondering what exactly he wants, if he's going to ask her to keep a really close eye on Mike and El, or if he's just going to tell her happy birthday privately in case she gets emotional.

Jim Hopper might be slightly emotionally constipated (getting better with El around and all that) but he can easily tell when the two superpowered girls he lives with are going to freak out. He can probably see she's on the edge of a full-blown melt-down right now.

"Am I in trouble, officer?"

He actually laughs at her dumb joke, then pulls her into a side hug.

The laughter is actually more shocking than the hug, seeing as she's gotten better at handling physical contact recently. She doesn't flinch away or tense up when Hop wraps an arm around her shoulders or just reaches out for her anymore. He usually keeps the dad-like physical affection to a minimum anyway, so it wasn't a hard adjustment, but still. Knowing that, he lets her go after two seconds (the usual duration of their occasional embrace) and wishes her a happy birthday like she expected.

"Oh, and Jane told me you were planning to spill the beans tonight."

Lilith rolls her eyes, "Of course she did."

"Just be careful. Wheeler likes to over react, Henderson is guna yap your ear off, and you *know* Harrington is guna get a little defensive

about you not saying something sooner."

"*Oh yeah*, don't I know it."

"Just try to have some fun before you drop the bomb, kid."

"I'll *try*, but no promises."

Then he leaves, shutting the door quieter than she expected him to. She doesn't walk back in to the living room until she hears the cruiser pull out of the driveway. When she finally returns she finds El is sitting hip to hip with Mike on the floor, only ballsy enough to do it now that Hopper's gone, and it makes Lilith chuckle. Her sister is a sneaky little rebel and it's *great*.

"Everything good?" Steve asks, coming up and wrapping his arm around her waist.

She nods.

"You sure?"

"Yeah, it's just..." She trails off because she doesn't know what to say.

*You're guna hate me in a little while?*

*I've been lying to you, by omission, but still lying?*

*I'll totally understand if you wanna break up after tonight?*

*Please don't hate me later?*

There are honestly a lot of things she wants to say, none of which are any easier to force out than her little truth session is going to be. She can barely think them without feeling like a horrible person.

"Just what?"

"Please don't, like, hate me? Later, I mean. Cause I'm guna say something you guys might get a little testy about in a bit, and I'm freaking out right now 'cause I'm scared you're guna, like, want me gone after. And I mean *gone-gone*."

"What are you even talking about?"

She deflates with a sigh, then turns her head and gives him her best *Everything is Okay* smile. "Nevermind. Let's just sit down and have fun."

Steve looks like he wants to ask more questions, but he doesn't do it. Instead he takes her hand and leads her to the couch, where Dustin squeezes in next to Steve and on the other side Max does the same to Lilith, squishing them together. Lucas sits on the floor by Max's feet, Will next to the coffee table so he can put his plate there and not make a mess when he eats, and finally El and Mike squished together on the other side of the table.

Everyone is here and happy and it hasn't gotten too quiet to bare yet.

That alone makes this the best birthday Lilith has ever had.

She puts off the inevitable for as long as she can. Distraction after distraction comes along and she thinks *after this, I swear* every time it happens. But then it continues without any room for her to start. They play a couple board games, watch a movie and then some game show reruns, the kids work off their new sugar rush with music and yelling at each other over said music for a couple minutes at one point.

She hates the distractions, but she's also thankful for them.

That is, until the universe or whatever decides to upend her whole *Tell Them Gently* plan and just dumps the revelation on them in the form of little Will Byers having one of his *moments*.

He gets that far off look again, the one he got before he walked out the front door that first time Lilith had been there for it. Except this time he doesn't move. He's just sitting on the couch, stiff as a board, staring at the wall across the room with glassy eyes.

*Everyone freaks the fuck out.*

But, like, they *don't* at the same time.

They obviously don't want Lilith to know what's going on. Don't want

to give her any kind of explanation, fake or otherwise, about what he's going through. And she gets that, she really does. But if she were anyone else that would just cause her to panic more and these people need to figure that out.

So, Will is zoned out, looking scared shitless. The boys and Max have crowded around him and are trying to wake him up. Steve is standing off to the side looking freaked out, wondering *very loudly* if he should call Joyce or Hop. And then there's El, standing calmly next to Lilith, head tilted to the side as she watches it all go on.

After a bit, she turns her big brown eyes to Lilith with a quiet, "Help?"

"I didn't want *this* to be how I tell them..." She mutters while biting her thumbnail.

*Her nervous tick.*

"But you want to help."

"Yeah, but the dipshits won't let me get near him."

"Oh." El says, turning to look at the group again for a second. Then she looks back up at Lilith and says, "I'll help."

El pulls her big sister forward by the front of her shirt and once they're close enough to tap any of the other kids on the shoulder El reaches out and pushes everyone to the side with her powers. She's practiced enough now that she doesn't get a nose bleed from easy shit like this.

They all look at El with shock and betrayal, and Mike with a little fear in his eyes because-

"El, *she's* here!"

El just nods at him with a small smile and then pushes Lilith forward with her mind. Nearly sends her sprawling on her stomach with the force. Instead, she stumbles until her knees hit the edge of the couch, and then she turns to give the small girl a little glare.

"Pushing is rude, El."

"*Help.*"

She rolls her eyes, which El glares at her for. So she rises her hands in surrender and says, "Okay, okay. I'm *helping*. Jesus..."

From an outsider's perspective, the entire scene looks completely stupid. Useless, even, with what's happening to Will. To the people around her, the people who think Lilith doesn't know *anything*, it just looks like a teenage girl kneeling in front of a comatose thirteen year old boy with her hands on his shoulders. She scrunches her eyes shut, her mouth set in a tight frown, brows knitted together like she's concentrating too hard on something they can't see or hear.

When Mike tries to ask El what's going on, she shushes him.

(He looks absolutely *scandalized* by the action.)

Steve is in the corner, watching. Worried, but smart enough to have figured it out on his own. People may think he's stupid, and say it to his face often enough for him to believe it sometimes, but he's smart enough to figure *this one* out on his own.

His girlfriend has mind powers.

Because *of course* she does.

*Was this what she meant earlier? She was guna tell us today and she was scared that we would get mad? That I'd get mad?*

It's not too surprising, after the initial shock of the revelation wears off. This *is* Hawkins, after all. Hell, *Steve* might even develop superpowers one day. It's not definite, but it's a possibility. He's not even sure if suddenly having magic powers would be good or bad, really. He just knows he kind of expects it to happen at some point because of all the weird shit that happens in his hometown.

But yeah.

His girlfriend has *superpowers*.

*Suck it, Mike. Not so special now, are you?*

It takes about five minutes for Will and Lilith to come out of their little trance. Both with a gasp. And that's the exact moment Lilith's nose starts to bleed, quick and heavily and *dark*, dripping steadily onto the leg of her sweatpants to create a weirdly rose-shaped blotch of nearly black blood. Steve runs to the kitchen for a towel, then runs back to the couch just as quick and gently presses it under Lilith's nose. She turns to him with hazy eyes that seem to look *through* him instead of *at* him.

"Okay, so I'm a little peeved." He says suddenly, knocking the haze right out of her eyes. Her startled look pushes him right into the next part of what he wants to say without hesitation. "Hey, wait a sec. I'm not done. Yeah, I'm kinda ticked you thought you couldn't tell me about this, but, like, *I get it* at the same time. So I'm not guna make you leave or anything, and I'm not *mad*. I'll get over it in about a minute."

She nods.

"You okay?"

"Getting in people's heads *hurts*."

"I bet."

"You're *way* more accepting of this than I thought you'd be."

"Ouch."

"Well, I mean, *c'mon* Steve. I've seen the things in your head. I know you tend to overreact sometimes."

His nose scrunches up in the most adorable way that makes Lilith giggle. And yeah, that might be partially because of how dizzy she still is, but it's also because it's a look she doesn't see often.

"What?"

She smirks, clears her throat, and does her best to imitate Mike first with "Maybe if we set this on fire-" and then switches to her best

Sarcastic Steve Voice for "Yeah, no, that's a *no*."

He stares at her.

"Or *this is crazy, this is crazy, this is crazy, THIS IS CRAZY!*" She chuckles. "I mean, most of your freak-outs are either sarcastic comments or repeating the same thing over and over until you're screaming it. Fuck, you asked Jon and Nancy what that monster was so many times that they actually synced up to tell you to shut up."

"How much have you seen, exactly?"

"A lot. Unintentionally. Skin to Skin contact makes it harder to block out. And you think *loud*."

"So, like, all the time? You hear my thoughts all the time?"

"No. I'm better at blocking people out from a distance. But you're really touchy and I can't help it when we, like, hold hands or brush shoulders in our sleep or whatever." She leans forward to press her forehead against his, "It's probably why we have nightmares at the same time most nights. I've pulled you out of a few really bad ones, actually."

She lets a quick image of the first time she did it pass between them for half a second, then pulls back and smiles at him.

To her surprise, he smiles back.

---

During the exchange between the two oldest teens in the room, the Party members have been huddled together. First to ask Will if he's okay, and then discuss what the Hell just happened.

"So she's like El?"

Will nods. "Yeah."

"And how do you know that?"

"Because she's helped me before."

Lucas and Mike immediately get defensive, claiming they knew there was 'something up with her' from the beginning. Dustin decides to stay out of it for now, opting to give Lilith the benefit of the doubt because she's Steve's girlfriend and Steve is like his non-related big brother. Max is quiet, mostly pissed she was left out of the loop once again

"Why didn't you tell us before?"

"I promised her I wouldn't!"

"So?! She could be brainwashed and working for the Bad Men or-"

"She's not one of them! She's *good*, you guys!"

"Just cause she's nice to us and mind-powered you out of a couple Upside Down visions doesn't mean she's *good*!"

"Oh my God! Why are you all so against her?" Max shouts.

"Because she *lied*!"

Will glares at Mike. "She didn't lie, she just never said anything."

"That's called *lying by omission*."

"Think about it this way, Wheeler. If you were like them, with the labs and everything, and suddenly you had people around you all the time, would you tell them you had powers *just* because you like them? Because I wouldn't! I'd keep that shit a secret until I *absolutely had to* tell them."

(Max, ever the angel. Always there to defend her fellow redhead.)

"Of course you're defending her! You guys are, like, best friends!"

"Dude, your girlfriend likes her! Maybe you should give her a chance."

Mike glares at the newest Party member, then turns to face El.

"You trust her?"

"Sister." She says with a nod. "Hopper knows too."

"Oh, well that's just *perfect*! Everybody knew but *us*!"

"It was an accident. She wanted to tell sooner, but she was scared. Didn't want to be... thrown away."

"And that's supposed to make it better?"

Dustin finally jumps in with, "Steve's not angry!"

"Steve *likes* her!"

"Which is why he *should* be angry. But he's not."

Dustin gestures towards the couple, who are as close to each other as they can be. Steve, holding the towel and dabbing under her nose every couple of seconds as more blood leaks from it. Lilith, looking even paler than usual as she leans against him with her eyes closed.

"He should be *pretty frickin' mad* that she didn't tell *him* of all people. But he's being cool about it!"

"Yeah, like I'm guna do something just because *The Great Steve Harrington* is doing it. That'd be like jumping off a bridge just because he did. No thanks."

"Jesus, you guys are impossible." Dustin sighs. "Just agree with your girlfriends and you might still have them after today. I'm guna go over there and hang with the cool kids."

Will says nothing as he follows after Dustin. Keeps his mouth shut and drops down next to Lilith on the couch, and finally smiles when she pulls him against her side for a tight hug and asks if he's feeling okay.

"So, do you, like, have a tattoo too?"

Steve glares at him. "Dustin!"

"What?"

"Seriously, man?"

"What? I'm just curious! And it's like, how did you *not* know she had powers? I mean, you've seen her *naked*, right? But you've never noticed a number tattooed on her somewhere?"

"Dude!"

"What?"

"Dustin, just shut up."

"Will, c'mon-"

"Seriously, shithead. Shut it."

"But Steve!"

"Jesus titty-fuckin' Christ, here!"

Lilith shoves her hand towards him (wrist up, cuff gone) so he can check out the stupid **007** inked into her pale skin. Dustin is instantly over the moon, and reaches out to touch her, but she pulls back at the last second with a glare.

"You touch me and I'll be able to learn every embarrassing thing you've ever done. *Mostly* involuntarily."

"Noted." He responds.

She holds her wrist out again, and this time the kid just leans over so he can get a better look.

It takes a while for the rest of the kids to wander over as well.

Max comes first, situating herself behind Lilith on the back of the couch, legs on either side of the older girl's shoulder. Then comes Lucas, who stands by the couch because he has no idea where he should be besides close to his kind-of-girlfriend. Dustin settled into the small space between Steve and the arm of the couch a little while ago, and has been asking question from there since he lost interest in Lilith's number. Will gets comfier against Lilith's side and stays quiet

as he watches everything happen. And finally, Mike and El come over together, hand in hand. El is all smiles whereas Mike looks like he just smelled something awful.

Lilith doesn't really care if they *all* like her. She can deal with a majority vote. And she knows she can count on Will and Max to always be on her side, along with her sister, along with Dustin because he's loyal to Steve and Steve likes her. That's four against two.

Meaning the odds are in her favor.

"Chill, kid, I haven't seen anything embarrassing in *your* head." She tells him, because that's all he can really think of right now so it's been getting louder and louder, harder to ignore with how weak she is right now. "*Yet.*"

"Wha-"

"But I *have* seen some stuff in *Nancy's head* that'll turn you a real nice shade of *mortified*."

"Oh my God..."

"I've got dirt on her too, though. And if you ever need some fuel for a fight, or maybe blackmail, gimme a couple bucks and I'll spill."

She probably won't, but sometimes she's mad enough at the damage that girl did to Steve's self-esteem that she might be tempted to actually deliver on her new promise. Apparently Mike likes the idea enough to sort of accept her reasons for not saying anything, which is nice, she guesses

"Okay, well, I'm guna take a nap now. I'll be so dead to the world that you won't even have to stay quiet, so party away Munchkinz. Have fun. G'night."

It's less than a minute before she drifts off.

---

**Just a little PSA:**

Constructive criticism is great and all, but being flat out rude and insulting and telling me *I wish this was better* is a dick move.

Thank you for reading. I love y'all from the bottom of my heart.

(The nice ones out of you, anyways.)

Bye for now!

### 33. Chapter 32

Warning: Dialogue heavy chapter

---

After her nap, which ended up lasting only twenty minutes, Lilith was roped in to a Q&A session with the kids. It included a lot of cake consumption out f boredom, and some booze for the two older kids.

Time flew during all that, and suddenly the little shit's were being picked up by various family members. Including Billy, who came to get Max with his *Just for Steve and Lilith* predatory grin. He even wished her a happy birthday when she walked Max to his car, if not a little sarcastically.

Now that Max knew about what she could do, she didn't mind digging into Billy's douche-y brain for some dirt to give the younger girl. She grabbed him by the bare wrist and took a deep breath, letting anything that was loose in the back f his mind float into her own. She could feel a tiny nosebleed coming on then, and dropped his wrist.

He gave her a look.

"Party a little too hard, Gingersnap?" He asked, tapping the side of his nose.

She wiped her nose on her sleeve (Steve's sleeve, actually, because she liked borrowing his stupid Rich Boy sweaters) and sneered at him.

"You'd know what that's like, wouldn't you?" She smirked when his smile dropped. "I might be trailer trash, but I'm not into that shit. Unlike you."

"You-"

"Best get home, *William*, before you get into trouble."

He growls (fucking *growls* like a goddamn *dog*) before he slips into the driver's seat, tires squealing as he peels out of the driveway.

Lilith sighs. She doesn't like what her what her parting words implied, she saw exactly what *trouble* Billy would be in if the step-siblings were late getting home, but she wanted him fucking *gone*. Didn't have the patience to deal with his shit after the week she's been having.

She watches them race down the street, only going back to the house when the taillights have faded into the dark distance.

Inside, Steve is cleaning up the mess left by the kids. Lilith is sure the vacuum is going to need to come out just because of Dustin and his messy way of eating, but she doesn't think Steve really minds the clean up as much as his mumbling lets on. It's endearing more than irritated. Like he'd clean a mountain of literal *shit* for those kids if they left it behind.

*He's totally their mom*, she can't help thinking.

It makes her smile.

"Been meaning to ask, where's your *actual* little brother?"

"Mom was pretty embarrassed by him being a little dick in a not-so-civilized way, so she sent him... somewhere that isn't *here*."

"*That's* why it's been so quiet 'round here..."

"Thank *God* for small miracles."

She giggles, tiptoeing her way over to stand behind him, and drags a finger up his spine. It's something she found out about him a couple weeks ago. A good source of entertainment, she decided when it happened the first time. *Always* makes him squirm.

"Real cute, *Stephen*."

He whips around so quick she can practically hear the cartoon *whoosh* that should come with the action.

"You-"

"Yeah, I heard some stuff." She says with a nod. "Didn't know you

spoke Italian."

His cheeks flush a bit as he replies, "Only a bit."

"You know any swear words?"

He goes from embarrassed to laughing in no time, but the blush doesn't leave.

---

It's midnight and she can't sleep.

Images from Will and Steve and Billy's brains float behind her closed eyes at breakneck speed. Can't seem to turn them off the way she usually can after the fact. Steve's she might be able to deal with, seeing as she only saw good things tonight, but Will's *Upside Down* episode and Billy's... well, basically his *everything*, are too freaky to get past.

*Maybe, she'll think later, me and Steve have some kinda... mental bond.*

Because just as she's starting to get frustrated with her inability to doze off, he speaks up.

"So, like, what've you seen in my head so far?"

She snorts, and cranes her neck so she can look up at him. "Be more specific."

"How embarrassing, on a scale of one to ten?"

"Embarrassing for *me*, or *you*?"

He shrugs.

"Well, there isn't an *exact* number. But I can tell you that I got a very *up close n' personal* look at Nancy's sex face which is just... *ew*."

"Oh my God..."

"And I watched you drop Jon's camera though *your eyes*, which was less embarrassing than it was... *irritating*."

Steve makes a weird noise in the back of his throat that Lilith takes as a mortified whine.

"But that was Old Steve, so..." She ends with a shrug before snuggling closer against him.

"You hated me, didn't you?"

"A bit, but only at first. I'll admit, you were pretty bad for a while. But then the first Demogorgon incident happened and you chilled out enough for me to see you weren't a monster. And after the last incident, when you came to school with your busted face, I could tell you'd left King Steve behind for good. You looked proud of yourself. Like your gashes and bruises were a badge that said *I survived and so did the people I fought for*."

"You wrote that you hoped they were from some *heroic act instead of a stupid fight that served no purpose*."

"You remembered that word for word." She mused, smirking, then poked him in the ribs. "You should treat your homework like my notes and maybe you'd get a B or something."

"Don't be a bitch."

"Excuse me, but I think *you're* the bitch most of the time. You can be such a drama queen sometimes..."

He snorts, and she can basically hear him rolling his eyes. Which, honestly, just proves her point.

"You know all this shit about me, but I don't know a lot about you."

"Ask away, Darlin'. I'm not guna hide anything now."

"Is Lilith your real name?"

"No, but it started with an L. Got my memories wiped in the Lab, so most of my life before is just a big blank."

"Where'd you live?"

"Before the lab? Alabama. The lab they took me to was in Montana, and I burned that fucker to the ground when I left. After that, when I started living with my weird-ass adopted family, we didn't stay anywhere longer than a couple weeks."

"What was your favourite stop?"

"Louisiana. New Orleans specifically. Blues, Voodoo and Bastardized French all over the place."

She closes her eyes, wraps her fingers around Steve's wrist, and shows what she remembers of the colourful city. The wicked music, amazing smelling food, interesting shops and that one late-night parade she got to see. When her little projection trick is done, she looks up to find him smiling, eyes closed.

"You ever been outside Indiana?" She asks.

"Once or twice, when my parents actually wanted me on their trips. So I've been to, like, Chicago and places close by."

"Well, we need to fix that shit." She tells him with a nod, (fake) pouting to show how serious she is right now. "We should go on a road trip some day. I'd love to go back to New Orleans, maybe Seattle, and there was this little town in Maine I visited for about a week that was neat."

"Sounds great." He decides to whisper before he kisses her temple, letting his nose rest where his lips had just touched for a bit.

With there little talk done but not entirely over, she finds that the bad shit she'd absorbed today has gone away. Poofed into nonexistence for a bit to let her sleep. She might not get a lot of it, seeing as it's already almost one o'clock in the morning. But she'll get enough to function at school tomorrow.

---

**Hey, look, I did one of those mini in-between-chapters chapters!**

**I felt like they needed to have a chat, and I wanted a little Billy sympathy (and I mean *little*, because this fic started when I was still a Billy Hater). I'm so sorry I got dialogue heavy with this**

one, but I'm better at dialogue than the rest of writing.

Also, my O key on my keyboard is being real finicky lately, so I had to go back and add O's all over the place.

That was a fun couple of hours!

## 34. Chapter 33

Imma be doin' short chapters for a while to get little things out of my head but also because I've been running on empty for this since I saw the teaser for Season 3...

So yeah, sorry.

PS: if this fic isn't over before season 3 comes out I'll be discontinuing it because I'll feel weird about not following canon events, and it'll be too late to change my plans for this thing by then.

---

As a late birthday present, Hop hands Lilith a manila folder. She gives him a look, then looks down at her gift and tears the top open.

Inside is a birth certificate, much like the one El has that she happily showed to Lilith a while back. The first name is Lilith, of course, but the last name is Hopper instead of Romancek, like she'd been using since she got out of Montana.

There's a long moment of silence where she simply stares at the fake document, eyes watering just a bit. Her grips gradually tightens until she ends up crinkling the side of the paper. Hop must think she's mad, because he gently lays a hand on her shoulder and tell her she doesn't *have* to use it. Says he just thought she might like the chance to go out and do something with her life, and that she needed to 'be real on paper' to do that.

And now she is.

There's another minute of silence, this time with Hop's hand still laying on her shoulder. Then, suddenly, too fast for Hopper to catch, she whips around and hugs him. Hugs him longer and tighter than they'd silently agreed to months ago. It catches him off guard, and he ends up standing there with his arms in the air like an idiot for about thirty seconds. After the shock wears off though, he wraps one arm around her shoulders while the other rubs a small circle between her shoulder blades to calm her down.

Because she's *sobbing*.

Which, honestly, is the only reason she gets weird and shy around him later that night. She does *not* cry around a lot of people, especially not authority figures.

The day after that Lilith starts to wonder if that was Hopper's way of buttering her up before Joyce inevitably had to be told about her past. As far as the woman knows, Lilith is just Steve's fairly new girlfriend who's *really good* with her traumatized younger son. Which, honestly, isn't *wrong*, but it's also not the whole truth.

And Hop *likes* Joyce. Lilith *knows* he liked Joyce and so does El. It comes with the mind-powers, y'know? But it's a lot stronger on Lilith's part so she's sure as shit that her new dad has a thing for Jon and Will's mom.

(She's secretly rooting for that whole mess to work out. Purely for the selfish reason of wanting an official mom, though.)

Anyways, the next day at about noon Joyce shows up with both of her boys. She does the knock, Hop answers the door, and then suddenly Lilith is wrapped in thin arms and whispered to in a teary voice.

"Oh, honey, I'm so sorry."

Lilith being Lilith, she tries to brush it off with a shrug and the Tough Act.

"It's, like, not that big a deal? I mean, I got out, right? So... yeah."

Joyce pulls back but leaves her hands on Lilith's shoulders and gives her a wet smile, sniffing a little before she talks. "It's just... I can't even *begin* to imagine how you kids got through that."

Lilith shrugs again but smiles back finally. Joyce brightens up when that happens, and that's when she finally takes her hands back. Lilith has space now to move herself around a bit, so she does. She wiggles uncomfortably in place on the couch next to her sister, then looks over at the pair of boys.

"How'd you get dragged here?"

"Everyone's busy today." Will replies as he comes over to drop himself between the two girls.

"I just wanted to brag to Nancy that I knew before her." He pauses to give her a little smirk. "Again."

"She's guna kill you for that."

Jonathan shrugs.

"You guna freak out too?"

"No, I'm good. I've known for a while, actually."

She whips around to stare at the smaller brother with wide eyes.  
"Will!"

"I'm sorry, I panicked! He started asking questions and I'm a *really bad* liar!"

She huffs, pretending to be angry for a few seconds before she reaches over with one hand and royally fucks up his weird bowl-cut.

"You're lucky I love you little shits, y'know that?"

"You're starting to sound like Steve." He tells her with his nose all scrunched up.

She throws her hands dramatically in the air with an expression that screams *Can You Believe This Shit?!*

"I'm in his head basically *all* the time! Of course I sound like *Steve!*"

## 35. Chapter 34

When Lilith finds a crap-load of crumpled up papers thrown across Steve's bedroom floor she can't help but snoop. Steve isn't the kind of person to just leave garbage all over his room, so she's stuck wondering why he would dump these everywhere and just forget about them.

The first one she opens is a single sentence scratched out so many times that she can't read a single word of it. The next one is a full paragraph, also scratched out beyond comprehension. She decides the third will be the last one she tries to read before she tosses them all in the trash because she doesn't want to be *too* nosy.

It's a full page with only a few sections crossed out in red ink.

She squints, trying to see the writing better through the scratches and-

Oh.

It's an essay.

A college application essay.

*Steve's* application essay.

Lilith sighs and balls it back up. She already knew Steve had been planning on going to college, because of course he would. He gets mostly B's in school and he's a great athlete, so he sure as shit has a bright future ahead of him with all that *plus* his father's influence.

But none of that mean she *likes* the idea of him leaving.

And where is Lilith's future headed? Probably nowhere. Maybe *everywhere*, but not in a good way. Most likely running away and lying and staying the Hell away from people.

She gathers the dozen or so crumpled balls of paper and tosses them in the trash can, pretending she never saw them in the first place. But she doesn't forget about them. No, she just pushes the topic to the

back of her mind until she feels like it's a good time to ask about it.

Which is later that day, or rather *night*, when there's nowhere either of them can run to because everything in town is closed until nine AM.

"So... college?"

Steve looks at her like he's trying to gauge her expression before he answers.

She gets a shrug in response.

"Where do you wanna go?"

"Dunno. Not sure I'm even guna apply."

*He's being dismissive*, she thinks. "Do you wanna go at all?"

"Do *you*?"

*Okay, he's just being a dick now.* "We aren't talking about *me*, Harrington."

His eyes go wide and he stares at her like she just slapped him.

*Yeah, how's **Last Name Basis** feel, asshat?*

"Why does it matter?" He asks, voice strained like he's trying not to yell.

"Why aren't you applying?"

He shrugs again, "Didn't feel right..."

"Is it... me?"

"What?"

"Is it 'cause you don't wanna leave me here?"

"Wha- No, that's not it! I just- I can't-"

She waits patiently, watching him closely. Almost too closely. She can see that it's making him squirm a bit.

"What are you guna do after graduation, then?"

"Oh my God, where is this coming from?!" He finally snaps.

"Because *I'm* guna bolt when *I* graduate!"

They lock eyes and her gut twists. He looks hurt but also concerned and maybe a little ticked off.

Mostly hurt, though.

"It was my plan from the get-go." She says quietly, looking down at her lap. "But then *this* happened and I decided to move it up a year."

"What do you mean?"

"I was guna leave the year I graduated, but I sped it up and told myself that when *you* graduate and go to college, that's when *I'll* go."

"Why?!"

She shrugs, "There's no reason to stay if you aren't here."

"Jesus Christ, I'm not going anywhere!"

"Why not, though?!"

"Because I can't even write the fucking essay properly!"

She pauses with her mouth open, any reply she might have had before gone now. She's just a little confused now, wondering why, exactly, Steve can't write his application essays. He's not as stupid as people think, his grades aren't the *worst*. In fact, they're actually *above* hers in most of the classes they both have.

"Why not?" She asks calmly.

"What?" He asks, cheeks now a nice shade of pink. He looks scared all of a sudden, like a deer caught in headlights. Or like he just realized he made some kind of horrible mistake.

"Why do you have trouble writing essays? Like, I know *I* can't get the words to come out the way I want them to. They don't sound as pretty on paper as they do in my head. But what about you?"

He bites his bottom lip and chews it for a second, crossing his arms as he turns to stare at the wall on his left.

"Steve..." She sighs.

When he gets like this it can take upwards of two hours to un-embarrass him enough to talk shit out, just like her.

Thank *God* they have fairly different definitions of embarrassing, or they would never be able to get anywhere in uncomfortable conversation with each other.

"I-" He starts but then stops to inhale sharply and let it out slowly through his nose, probably gathering up some courage to say what he wants. "I... have a hard time with the words. Kinda like you, but more along the lines of... the letters jumping around on me."

She squints, head tilting to the side slightly. "Huh?"

"When I'm reading or writing, the words get all jumbled. Like someone put them in a container and shook 'em up, then dumped 'em back out on the paper." He sighs. "Plus I can't get my thoughts to stay in the right order so everything gets all messy and hard to follow..."

"Oh, I get it now."

His shoulders slump slightly with that. Lilith watches him chew on his lip some more. He still won't meet her eyes, but at least he's facing her.

"What if..." She reaches out to grab one of his hands in both of hers. "What if, since you can think the words better than you can write them, you tell me what you wanna say and I write it down?"

"That sounds like a great plan, Lil, really. But I'm kinda *over* the idea of college now."

"Won't your parents be pissed?"

"Probably." He replies with a little shrug. "They'll just have to suck it up."

"What're you guna *do*, then?"

"You think it'd be weird for me to work for Hop?" He asks, giving her a shy smile. "Seeing as he's your *dad* now and all."

"Maaaaybe."

She gives him a smirk as she pulls him towards her by the hand she's been holding, causing him to stumble forwards until he's standing with his knees against hers. She lets go of him so she can use both hands to tug the front of his shirt until he leans forward, and that's when she catches him for a deep kiss.

When she lets him straighten up again he's blushing red instead of pink and it makes her giggle.

"I'm mostly stuck on the mental image of you in the uniform."

"Good or bad image?"

"Sooo good." She tells him with a dopey grin.

He mirrors the look.

"Oh, and Baby? When you get the job promise me you'll steal a pair of cuffs."

He laughs, then. Full and real. It makes her grin knowing that she did that, that she *can* do that so easily whenever she needs to, or just when she feels like it.

"But what are *you* guna do?"

She shrugs.

"Lil..."

"I'll figure it out eventually. All I know is for sure is that you're stuck with me, so if you've gotta leave Hawkins for cop training or

whatever, I'm going with you."

"Is that supposed to be a threat?"

"Why?"

"Cause a threat shouldn't sound like such a frickin' *awesome* idea."

---

He doesn't see it the first day it's there, but he notices it *eventually*.

Lilith has one of her wrists all bandaged up and taped together. It doesn't look like a serious injury with how *not* careful she is with it, but he's still concerned. So he asks what happened. She just smiles at him, wide and toothy and so so excited.

"I know what I'm guna do."

"Like... like as a career?"

She nods once, still smiling wide. "Yep."

She starts unwrapping the bandage carefully. That's when he realizes that it's her tattooed wrist that's been covered for the last few days. It'd taken the place of that old leather cuff she loves so much so he hadn't really registered that the gauze had been there, because Lilith *always* covers that wrist with something. When the white fabric falls away finally he expects to see blood or stitches along with that stupid fucking **007** that's usually there...

Instead he sees a *butterfly*.

It's made of heavy black lines that wrap around yellow/orange/red gradient wings and a long black oval for a body. The **007** and faint scars from years of struggling against restraints are nowhere to be seen. Steve assumes that's what the new tattoo was bought for.

It's simple.

And *really* pretty.

"I'm guna be a tattoo artist."

"That-" He takes another couple seconds to let *that* sink in as he pulls her wrist forward so he can have a better look at her new ink, then looks up and grins. "That's a wicked idea, Lil."

"Thanks."

"Do I get half price?"

"Only if you promise to steal cuffs from work like we talked about."

"Oh that's definitely happening, don't you worry."

It's left alone for the rest of the day. Wrapped up and covered by her sleeve to avoid attention from teachers. But at around midnight when neither of them are asleep and they're laying there just staring at the ceiling together without a word, while Lilith draws meaningless pictures on his chest with her fingertip and Steve runs his fingers through a loose section of her braided hair, Steve finally asks a question that's been on his mind for a few hours now.

"Why orange?"

"Hmm?"

"The butterfly. It's orange. I mean, I know there's a little red and yellow too, but why *orange*?"

"My hair, I guess?" She shrugs. "At first it was guna be a monarch. Those are mostly orange. But then I thought a really simple design would be better."

"Oh."

"And the red's in there 'cause you said it suits me."

"God, you're *such* a sap." He tells her with a snort, but she can tell it's just to cover up how highly embarrassed he is by the revelation.

Lilith focuses, tuning into Steve's radio station for a quick peek. His internal monologue is just a stream of happy thoughts about his one time compliment from *months ago* having something to do with such a permanent mark on her skin. Even if it's only in the tips of the

wings, barely visible unless you get close enough.

"I'm glad you're happy, dork."

"Ugh! Get out of my *head*!"

She sticks her tongue out at him.

---

Sorry I've been gone so long.

Had some shit to do and other fic ideas to start working on.

Also, it's my birthday today, so I've been doing absolutely nothing productive as a sort of celebration.

("I'm 20, woooo! Imma sit on my fat ass and do nothing all day!")

Like, I just finished watching all available episodes of *Z Nation* (a favourite of mine). And FUCK, I am sooooo deep into the *Detroit: Become Human* fandom now that it's kinda consumed my life. Not to mention motherfucking *Hannibal*...

Jesus, the Hannigram stuff on tumblr... I swear I'd sell my soul for that shit to be cannon in the season \$ we'll probably never get.

So, long story short, I've been overloaded with AU and drabble ideas.

Plus writers block for this fandom in particular.

I think I'll be taking an indefinite hiatus after I post this.

Sorry again. Bye for now.

## 36. Chapter 35

This is Dialogue Heavy and was written in less than 25 minutes.

Please excuse the sub-par chapter and any mistakes I made...

---

Kali is...

Almost *exactly* how Lilith thought she might be.

There had been guesses that she might be a little on the punk side, but not *this* much. She thought maybe the girl would have an almost permanent scowl directed at everyone, but didn't expect her to smile at El whenever they locked eyes. And an accent from anywhere but America didn't even cross her mind until Lilith heard her speak.

Then there's her name.

*Kali.*

As in, the Hindu *Goddess* that *destroys evil*.

Whereas Lilith is named after a Jewish *Demon* that *steals and eats babies*.

It just seems a little funny in a not-so-funny way that one of her Lab Sisters is *Goddess* while she herself is a *Demon*. They are exact opposites in that respect, and many others to be honest, but seem to have similar dispositions. Grumpy and distrustful, hateful towards most of the world and the people in it aside from the few friends they have and their mutual little sister.

They all kind of end up a little stuck on the fact that Lilith is **007** and Kali is **008**. The two older girls are a little ticked off that they've never met before today, and think that they should've at least *heard of each other* if they're so close in the number sequence.

But most of all Lilith is still pissed that the first thing Kali did when Lilith walked into the cabin was use her powers to fuck with her.

And by *that* she means: projecting an image of Lilith's parents, her biggest fear, angry and shouting at her, until she back up against the door and slid to the ground. Her head went down, her knees came up, and her eyes started to sting.

She fucking bawled. Which is the *only* reason Kali stopped. But also because El very angrily told her to. *Mostly* because El told her to.

The reason she's still mad about it?

It has nothing to do with scaring her or bringing up shitty memories of the people who sold her to the government. No, it's because now she *remembers* them. She remembers their faces and voices like she'd just seen them yesterday, and *that's* what makes her angry. She was more than happy to have them wiped from her memory back at the Montana Lab, but Kali dug them out of her subconscious and flung them right in her face.

And for that, Lilith won't talk to her for the first few hours of the visit.

Eventually, though, El gets tired of the tense silence and tries to make them talk to each other. She looks back and forth between her sisters, searching for something in common between them, and ends up settling on their ink. The simple fish skeleton behind Kali's ear and the bright butterfly on Lilith's wrist. One of those is new, which gets her curious, and so she brings it up.

"You like?"

"Pretty..." El whispers, gently brushing her fingers over one of the wings.

"I was thinking about it a lot, 'cause it covers up my number, and had this idea that maybe we could make it a *thing*."

"Thing?" El echoes at the same time Kali asks, "What kind of 'thing'?"

"For us. To cover up our numbers and help find each other. In a way only *we* know about. We don't want people to see our numbers but we wanna stay connected, right? So, we get matching tattoos, and each of us gets our own colour."

El perks up right away and excitedly says, "Pink."

"I think purple." Kali says quietly.

"I've already got orange." Lilith waves her wrist above her head a few times with a little smirk. "I'm not saying you guys *have to* get one, but I liked the idea. They're a lot prettier than the numbers, anyway."

El wraps her arms around one of Lilith's and smiles. "I like it."

"Hop's guna be pissed though. He still doesn't know I got it."

"Bad?"

"Illegal if you're under 18." Kali tells her. "That's why I did my own."

"I'm guna try being a tattoo artist after school. When I get my license or whatever, I'll do it for you guys."

"Deal." They answer together.

After that, everything is a little less horrible. They talk, and sometimes make jokes. The two older girls seems to share a dark sense of humor that goes right over the youngest's head. And for that they're both thankful.

Kali apologizes for what she showed Lilith before and asks who they are, is more than understanding when it comes to Lilith's snippy answer. They compare powers and Teenage Runaway experiences and crazy nights with friends. Lilith even invites Kali to sleep in the trailer with her seeing as there's barely enough room for just Hop and El to sleep in the cabin, and she accepts.

Lilith just hopes it'll end up a better 'sleepover' than the couple of awkward ones she's had with Nancy.

(They definitely won't compare to the sleepovers she's had with *Steve*, though.)

It's all nice and warm and almost feels like a strangely nice dream.

Until Hopper comes home, anyway.

(But that's too long of a story, full of shouting and exasperated sighs from Hopper, to go through right now...)

---

**Hop proceeds to freak out about the unexpected visitor, then reams the new girl out for being reckless with El when they were together during the Mind Flayer bullshit.**

**After that's over he goes back to being Super Nice Dad (to all 3 of them) and goes out to get some pizza for everyone.**

**He doesn't ask Kali too many questions because he believes that in this particular instance: *Ignorance is Bliss*.**

## 37. Chapter 36

I don't wanna say I'm *abandoning* this fic...

But I *am* hitting the 'completed' button until I can get up the gumption to actually finish it.

Sorry.

### 38. Thinking about a Rewrite

I've been thinking about completely redoing Changes now that I'm not constantly sleep deprived.

Because that means my shit might actually be *good* instead of *on the shittier side of decent enough*.

Also, I wanna get into Season 3 with it but kinda can't with where I left it so it might get a total revamp.

But I've also thought of just writing up a quick *Here's What Happened Between Seasons 2 & 3* and then going onto S3 from that. With some retconning.

Because I'm a horrible fanfic author like that.

Thoughts?

P.S. I'm so so so sorry that this isn't a new chapter. It's just that I've been getting a lot of emails about new favs and follows for this fic and I feel so bad that I haven't touched it.

I just... don't have anything else to add I guess. I never made a plan for it. I just wrote off the top of my head when I had time, or hopped to it whenever a daydream or random sentence hit me.

And then last week I binged S3 and now I wanna get into that.

Making Robin and Lil friends.

Saving certain people from their imminent deaths.

and a bunch of other shit.

Also, Lilith making fun of Steve's Scoops uniform.

***Okay, bye!***